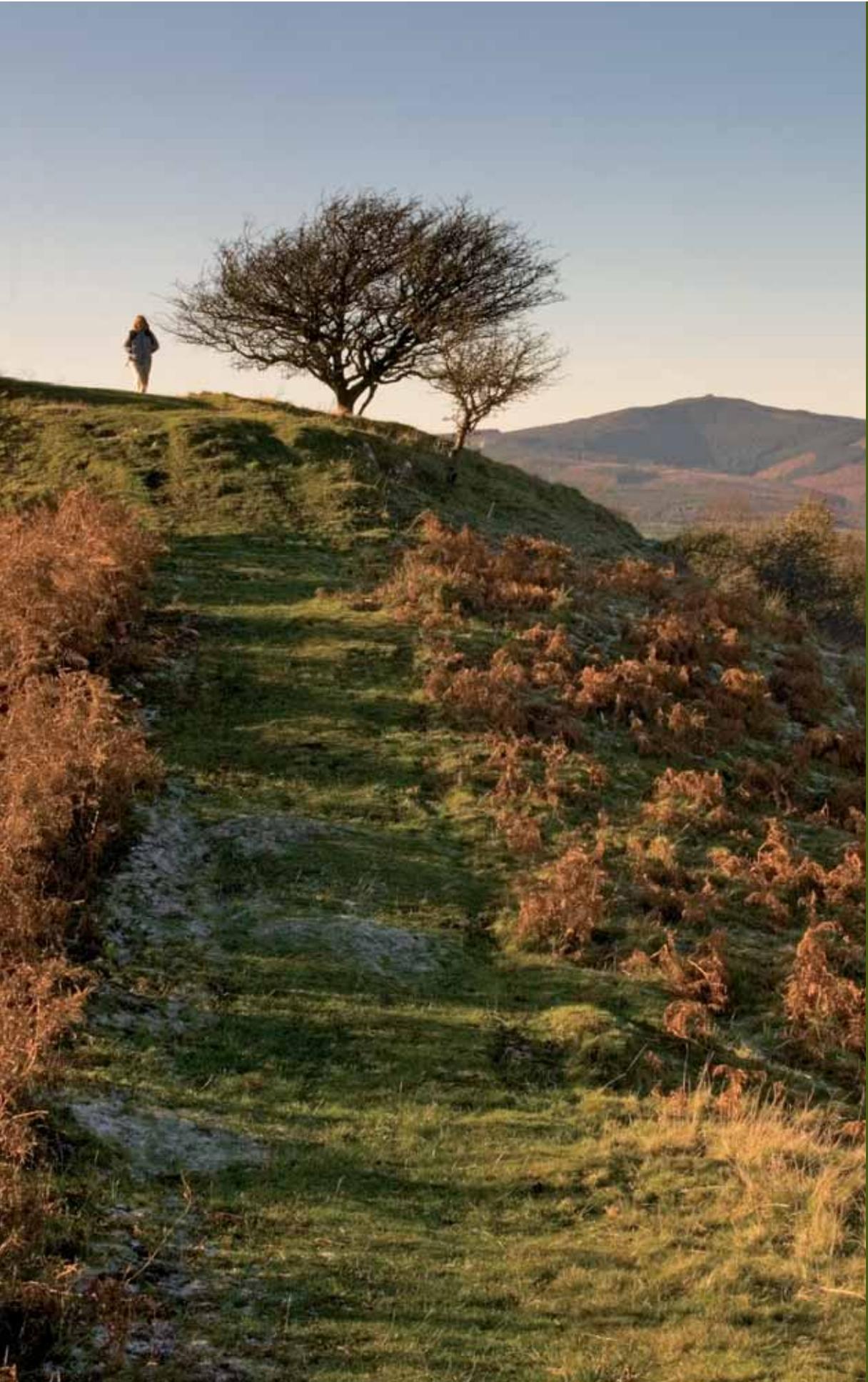


Countryside News 2009

Denbighshire and the Clwydian Range AONB



Welcome

Denbighshire Countryside Service work to improve the special landscapes, wildlife and heritage of Denbighshire and the Clwydian Range Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and also help people to enjoy and appreciate their environment. Denbighshire Countryside Service manage over 34 Countryside Sites as valuable places to visit and protect, some of which are nationally or internationally designated.

The Countryside Team provide an integrated service including; conservation, biodiversity, archaeology, geodiversity, education, interpretation, events, sustainable tourism, access, landscape strategy, funding, environmental and building management.

This small team has completed numerous projects that contribute to sustainable living, working and encourage respect for our environment. The achievements are showcased in this annual newsletter. These accomplishments would not have been possible without our partners and the extraordinary volunteers who give freely of their own time, skills and enthusiasm.

We hope you enjoy our countryside news...

Loggerheads Country Park

☎ 01352 810614 (weekdays)

☎ 01352 810586 (weekends & holidays)

loggerheads.countrypark@denbighshire.gov.uk

Denbighshire Countryside Service

Loggerheads Country Park, Nr Mold, Denbighshire CH7 5LH

Ruthin Office ☎ 01824 708261

Rhyl Office ☎ 01745 356197

Llangollen Office ☎ 01978 869618

www.denbighshire.gov.uk/countryside

All walks, events, news and education publications are available to download from this website.

www.clwydianrangeaonb.org.uk

www.heatherandhillforts.co.uk

www.ridetheclwyds.com

www.ridehiraethog.com

www.deealleywalks.com

www.biodiversityindenbighshire.co.uk

www.clwydiancountry.co.uk



This project has received funding through the Rural Development Plan which is financed through the European Union and the Welsh Assembly Government.



A personal audio guide



Visitors to both Moel Famau and Corwen can now enjoy their own personal guided walk to help them explore the area's fascinating past through the Heather and Hillforts Project.

Using the latest technology, visitors can access new audio points via their mobile telephones at the cost of a local call or by downloading the free mp3 versions from the internet.

The audio tours include information from archaeologists to nature experts. Visitors have the unique chance to be shown around this fascinating area by the people who live in it, work in it and love it.

If you fancy an audio tour of Moel Famau Country Park to the Jubilee Tower or from Corwen up to the Iron Age hillfort of Caer Drewyn call 01352 230123 for the Moel Famau tour or 01490 555123 for the Caer Drewyn tour or visit the Heather and Hillforts website www.heatherandhillforts.co.uk

All Wales Coastal Path



Coastal paths around Wales are being created and improved with the ultimate aim to have an All Wales Coastal Path by 2012. Denbighshire's section of the All Wales Coastal Path is currently being developed and improved. This is a scheme funded by the Welsh Assembly Government via the Countryside Council for Wales to improve access to the coast for local communities and visitors. The Denbighshire section follows Rhyl promenade to Barkby Beach and goes through the internationally important dune habitat to Presthaven.

For further information contact 01745 356197.



Take the Pole Position to get fit!

The latest outdoor fitness craze has come to Denbighshire.

Nordic walking was originally a summer training method for cross-country skiers in the 1930's. The use of poles ensures a complete body workout, burning up to 20% more calories than walking. It is one of the fastest growing recreational fitness activities across the world, with participants in nearly 40 countries.

Katrina Day, Let's Walk Denbighshire Coordinator said, "Nordic walking is a fun way to get fit! It is suitable for all age groups, including those with some mobility problems. Although walking is a great way to exercise, nordic walking allows you to achieve more with the use of walking poles, strengthening your muscles and burning even more calories."

Research has proven that it improves upper body strength and uses 90% of your body muscle mass. It burns body fat and tones arms, chest, back, shoulders, abdomen, hips, bottom and thighs.

- ▶ Exercises 90% of your muscles.
- ▶ Burns 20% more calories than ordinary walking at the same speed.
- ▶ A higher heart rate is achieved compared to ordinary walking.
- ▶ Exercise more with less effort.
- ▶ Reduces the load on your knees and other joints.
- ▶ Can reduce tension in the neck and shoulder muscles.
- ▶ Can reduce back pain and improve spinal mobility.
- ▶ Strengthens the bones of the lower and upper body, combating the effect of osteoporosis.

Please ring 01745 356197 or email loggerheads.countryside@denbighshire.gov.uk for more details

Going Wild at Loggerheads!



A new wildlife garden is being created at Loggerheads Country Park by local volunteers. What was once a tired corner of the tea gardens is fast becoming a haven for wildlife. The garden, designed by the volunteers, will include a pond, a new hedge, native wildflowers and wildflower meadow, and a bog garden, as well as other features such as habitat piles and a bird feeder.

The garden, when complete, will hopefully inspire people to 'transform' a little bit of their garden for wildlife. Small changes can have a big effect, for example leaving a woodpile could create a home for a range of creatures, including hedgehogs and small mammals. The garden will also look beautiful and will hopefully provide enjoyment all year round for all who visit the Country Park.

Curving feature



Local artist Mike Owens, commissioned by Cadwyn Clwyd and the Clwydian Range AONB, created a landscape inspired piece of art for Loggerheads Country Park.



Digging up the past on Penycloddiau

Archaeologists from Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, as part of the Heather and Hillforts Project, excavated a mound at the northern end of Penycloddiau hillfort.

The mound is being eroded by walkers using the Offa's Dyke Path National Trail and it is important to find out if it was man-made or natural. Visitors had the chance to meet the archaeologists and visit the site each day. Initial results suggest that the mound is likely to be a Bronze Age burial mound, built around 4000 years ago, older than the Iron Age hillfort (2500 years old).

During the excavation a stone was found with a message from a WWI soldier. The message read: 'Carlyle D Chamberlain, Canadian Army, Prospect, Kentucky, USA'. After an appeal for information the Denbighshire Countryside Service was contacted by David Chamberlain, his grandson, who wrote "Although my grandfather was born in Prospect, KY he joined the Canadian Army and served with them during WWI. My grandfather was an avid hiker, outdoors man, and had a keen interest in natural history, archaeology and photography." Samantha Williams, Hillforts Conservation Officer, said "Although this artefact isn't as old as the hillfort or the burial mound it's a fantastic piece of social history giving us a little snap-shot of a day 90 years ago when a Canadian soldier walking up here, stopped and decided to write his name on a stone."



Pencoed Woodland

It is now the fourth year that Denbighshire Countryside Service has been working in partnership with Denbigh Community Conservation Volunteers on the Pencoed project, Denbigh.

The first stages of the project followed the award of a grant from Cyd Coed for £80,000 to transform an inaccessible area of woodland into a usable green space for people from Denbigh and surrounding areas. The project initially focused on; access for all, woodland management, regeneration, information and training for various local youth groups. The woodland is now flourishing and visitors and biodiversity have increased.

The most recent work has been enabled by a DCC Health and Wellbeing grant. Practical training days in traditional countryside skills such as dry stone walling, hedge laying and dead hedging have been a great success. So far the groups that have taken advantage of this opportunity have been Denbigh Community Conservation Volunteers, Y Gelli, Denbighshire Youth Services and Denbighshire Countryside Service Volunteers.



There are plenty more sessions planned in the woods for this year so please call 01745 356197 for information.

Improving Loggerheads

A new 'Touch Screen' evaluation point has been installed in the Countryside Centre at Loggerheads Country Park. This allows visitors to provide valuable feedback about the park, which we can use to try to improve our facilities and service. Over 800 people completed the questionnaire in the first eight months.

Information such as;

50% of responders completed the questionnaire during the weekend, the quietest day was a Tuesday (6%) and the busiest a Sunday (30%), can be useful in deciding when to work on the site, what days we need more staff, when we should hold events, etc. Next time you visit Loggerheads – have your say!



Bus Shelters

When the A494 between Llanferres and Tafarn y Gelyn was built several years ago, local people, school children and visitors using public transport between Mold and Ruthin had little or no protection from the elements until new shelters were constructed. Funding from the Welsh Assembly could only provide modern, glass panel style shelters which would have looked out of place in the heart of the Clwydian Range AONB at the gateway to Moel Famau Country Park.

Llanferres Community Council were able to secure extra funding from the Sustainable Development Fund for the AONB, Cadwyn Clwyd and Denbighshire County Council to provide four shelters whose design reflects local styles using traditional building materials. All the shelters are locally made and display panels containing information about the landscape, history and culture of the area and other important features.



Roman Remains

The only Roman site between Chester and Caernarfon is in Prestatyn.



Tucked away at the end of Melyd Avenue on the outskirts of the town are the preserved remains of a small bath house built for Roman soldiers of the Twentieth Legion in about 120AD. Now it appears isolated but when it was built it was part of a thriving military settlement, perhaps with a harbour, that played a part in the local lead industry. Next time you are in Prestatyn take a detour to visit this site, it's only a short walk from the town centre.

Going Underground

Utilities companies across the UK have an obligation to move power cables underground in Protected Landscapes such as National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). Scottish Power agreed to underground power cables running through Moel Famau Country Park as it is within the Clwydian Range AONB.

Scottish Power and their contractors Murphy Plc worked through the winter to dig the trenches and lay cables along a 3.5km stretch. Most of the power lines are now underground, with the final section of pylons to be removed this year. As part of the project, they also funded a surfaced footpath that links the two car parks in the park so that people do not need to use the road. The results are fantastic!

Before



After



Gronant Calling



The long journey from Western Africa has begun for one of Denbighshire's special summer visitors, the little tern.

Each spring these tiny, slender seabirds travel north to breed but have to overcome many threats to their survival. These include predation by fox, kestrel and crows. With human disturbance and adverse weather conditions adding to the birds' problems, wardening at sites all over the UK is now essential to maintain numbers.

The 2008 season at Gronant was similar to 2007 in both its adverse weather conditions and thankfully also for the commitment of staff and volunteers. The colony reached counts of up to 104 fledglings at its peak during mid August and it remains one of the most productive colonies in the UK.

Denbighshire County Council Countryside Service, with essential funding from the Countryside Council

for Wales is responsible for the wardening at Gronant Dunes.

Garry Davies, Senior Warden from Denbighshire Countryside Service said:

"As well as being the last remaining little tern colony in Wales, Gronant Dunes is now one of the largest in the UK. Volunteer effort continues to play a significant role in the colony's success and we would like to say a big thank you to those contributing to over 1200 hours of time this season".

For those willing to spend a couple of hours to help the rare little tern during 2009, between May and August, please contact the Countryside Service at the Brickfields Pond Office on 01745 356197



Lizard searchers wanted!



Previous editions of this newsletter have told you about the re-introduction of the rare sand lizard to Gronant Dunes. We are now at the stage of establishing whether this project has been successful through monitoring of the (hopefully) burgeoning population. 2008 was the first year surveys were undertaken and lizards were found! Not in large numbers, but enough to indicate the population is doing OK and has spread out a small distance from the release site. We are repeating the monitoring this year and are on the lookout for volunteers to come and help. Training will be provided and a rota established so that the population can be surveyed throughout the breeding season. We're hoping by October we might even see some juveniles to show the lizards really are doing what they should!

A New Era for Shepherd's Cottage



The old Shepherd's Cottage in Coed Nercwys and the enclosure surrounding it are to have a facelift! The old cottage and small enclosure were a feature of Nercwys Mountain before Coed Nercwys was planted in the early 1960s but for decades have been hidden by the crop of trees.

Work has already begun to remove tree stumps left behind after timber harvesting, and to rebuild the dry stone wall around the enclosure.

The Forestry Commission Wales and the Clwydian Range AONB are working in partnership to rejuvenate the area and turn it into a flower-rich hay meadow. Due to current agricultural practices, flower-rich hay meadows are a scarce habitat, yet they can support such a wealth of plant species and can in turn provide



habitat and food for many different animal species. The display of flowers during spring and summer is spectacular.

The old Shepherd's Cottage (at the top of the enclosure) has long since been a pile of rubble, but with the help of Denbighshire's County Archaeologist and local volunteers, we hope to survey the old building and its foundations and ensure that it is preserved.

It is expected to take a couple of years before we see an array of colourful flowers in the enclosure, but we are sure it will be worth the wait!

Securing the wall

Despite the poor weather of 2008, the penultimate season of work at Castell Dinas Brân was completed in December.

For the first time in many years a section of the D shaped tower was clad in scaffolding and reconstruction work was carried out by Burleigh Stone. Most of the work was repointing of the masonry in order to prevent the weather, particularly rain and frost, getting into the wall.

It is always a great opportunity to have a close up look at the castle and having scaffolding up means we can look at parts of the building we can't normally get to. This year was exciting because at the very top of the wall was the hint of the remains of a staircase. This led to a corridor and gave access to the upper levels of the tower and to the hall next door. When



originally built in the thirteenth century, Dinas Brân was very grand but little of that remains and we have to try to piece together the grandeur from hints like these found in 2008.

The castle is a fantastic place, well worth the steep climb, you'll be rewarded with marvellous views. Thanks to grant aid from Cadw and Denbighshire County Council a better preserved and safer castle will help you conjure up an image in your head of what life was like when it was first built.



Heathland Management moves up a gear



Cuts and burns in the heather on Moel Famau has become a familiar site in recent years, but as you explore further, into the Clwydian Range and Llantysilio mountains, you may notice this heathland management technique spreading. The Heather and Hillforts team have been working with landowners and graziers to try to improve the habitat for grazing animals and wildlife. More than 30 acres of heathland has been cut and burnt on Moel y Parc, Penycloddiau, Moel Arthur, Moel Gyw and the Llantysilio ridge. For more information on this type of management, visit www.heatherandhillforts.co.uk.

Helping ratty protect his home in the Wheeler Valley

Ratty, the stoical hero of Kenneth Graham's *The Wind in the Willows*, once a common sight along many waterways, these days goes by another name - the much more unenviable 'Britain's fastest declining mammal'.



Andrew Parkinson

Not a rat at all, but a water vole, this herbivorous bank-dweller has disappeared from over 90% of the sites it once occupied and experts warn it could become extinct in North Wales in the next 10 years.

However, it is still managing to cling on in some areas, including the Wheeler Valley within the Clwydian Range AONB. Over the last two years, a project has enabled surveying to establish where they are present and work with landowners to manage and enhance suitable habitat for them. As with much of our wildlife, habitat loss and degradation have affected these creatures, but the introduction of the voracious american mink has also been a particular problem. Recently workshops have been run to encourage landowners to participate in the project through habitat improvements and mink control and we hope, through engaging as many people as we can, the Wheeler catchment can become a stronghold for this popular animal.



Terry Whitaker

Prestatyn Hillside welcomes new arrivals



A long running project to protect the rare juniper plant on Prestatyn Hillside has finally born fruit as the first set of plants have been planted back out on the hillside.

Wild populations of juniper plants in Britain have declined sharply in the last 50 years. Most are extremely old with little or no regeneration occurring. The plants in Prestatyn are no exception. They are over 100 years old and no new ones have been recorded for many years.

Four years ago Denbighshire Countryside Service started taking cuttings to try and grow them until they reached a size able to withstand the pressures of scrub encroachment and rabbit grazing. This did not prove to be an easy task, but with the help of botanists from Chester Zoo, some cuttings have been successfully nurtured and at the end of 2008 were re-planted in the wild. They will now be closely monitored and scrub clearance around them and their parents will continue to ensure their survival.

More plants will be ready this year and we hope that a younger, healthier population can be established so that they will still be seen here in another 100 years time.

The Aliens have landed

Alien invasive species - plants or animals that are not native to the UK but have become established here and spread rapidly - are becoming an increasing problem for our already struggling wildlife.

One example is himalayan balsam, a tall plant with pink flowers found in dense stands along river and stream banks. Introduced in 1839 from the western Himalayas, it has escaped from gardens and nurseries. It suffocates other bank-side vegetation, reducing biodiversity and because it is shallow rooting it leaves banks bare when it dies in autumn, making them susceptible to erosion.



A large scale project has been established to tackle this problem plant along the River Alyn, involving Denbighshire Countryside Service and the AONB, Flintshire County Council, the North Wales Wildlife Trust, North East Wales Wildlife, Friends of the Alyn Valley Woods, Llanferres Community and Keep Wales Tidy. A mass pulling campaign to begin the process of eradication is taking place from 27th June to 5th July and we need your help! Look out for flyers and posters advertising events and come along to take part in a bit of alien bashing!

Aerial Bracken Control

Bracken is an invasive plant in a moorland habitat. In large quantities it covers valuable grazing land for sheep and habitat for ground nesting birds. It is also a favourite home for disease carrying sheep ticks.

Cutting and bruising bracken is common as a method to try and

restrict its spread. In the summer of 2008, the Llantysilio mountains received a boost in the effort to control bracken though an aerial spraying programme.

The Environment Agency and Countryside Council for Wales agreed the use of the herbicide Asulox, which was sprayed on 675 acres of bracken. The expected success rate for bracken clearing is close to 100%. Once removed species such as heather and bilberry have the chance to thrive in its place, improving the heathland for wildlife and agriculture.



Flower Power

Gro Isa is a small enclosure of meadow and scrub located on the banks of the River Dee in Corwen. The meadow area is laden with wildflowers, herbs and long grasses providing a home and food to a variety of insects. The scrub provides much needed shelter allowing nesting sites for a variety of birds, rabbits and the elusive otter.



Regular flooding of the River Dee has damaged surrounding fences allowing sheep from neighbouring fields to enter and graze. Envious cattle on the opposite side of the river have even been seen 'paddling' across the river when it is low in the summer to join in on this free feast. This grazing has prevented the wildflowers from flowering and setting seed. Scrub encroaching onto the meadow and the brambles and gorse out-competing other plant communities is threatening Gro Isa and the life it supports.

But good news! Denbighshire Countryside Service has entered into a Management Agreement with Countryside Council for Wales to address these issues. Funding for a new fence to be installed will prevent livestock from grazing here. Volunteers have been assisting the warden in clearing the scrub encroachment too, so hopefully the meadow will be full of the colourful wildflowers and the buzz of insects again this year.

Not so Poplar!



Volunteers at Loggerheads have once again been out in force to complete another difficult task by removing a large area of non-native hybrid poplar trees. The trees were originally planted in the 60's by the Crosville bus company to provide wood for matchsticks. Removing these trees will enable native trees to flourish and allow more sunlight to reach the woodland floor, benefiting the ground flora and associated wildlife. The area can then be managed as a coppice. Volunteers worked hard hand-cutting the poplar and burning the timber to prevent it re-rooting and beginning to grow back. In total over 200 hours of volunteer time were needed to complete the job!

School children plant for the future?



Over 100 children from four local primary schools braved the cold weather to help plant 1000 oak trees at Coed Pen y Pigyn in Corwen.

The site was cleared of western hemlock over five years ago. Since that time several of the remaining mature native oak trees have fallen victim to strong winds. The hard work of the children, and our partners Forestry Commission Wales will ensure that in years to come, Coed Pen y Pigyn will continue to be important oak woodland.



Outdoor classroom

Classrooms don't have to have walls! Denbighshire Countryside Service has been helping students from Ysgol Dinas Bran transform part of the school ground into a haven for wildlife. Students have been swapping pens for bow saws and learning skills such as coppicing, woodland crafts and creating a wildflower meadow. The cut wood has been used to create special wintering homes, or hibernacula, for local amphibians and reptiles, such as slow worms.

Students who are members of the school's Eco-council and those involved with the Prince's Trust have been attending the sessions every fortnight, come rain, sun or snow!

Following the footsteps of our ancestors

Seven schools from Flintshire and Denbighshire travelled back in time during the Denbighshire Walking Festival!

Students from local primary schools traced the steps of their ancestors from Coed Llangwyfan up to Penycloddiau hillfort. Along the way characters from the past showed how the hills of the Clwydian Range were used throughout time.



'Jack The Grouse' revealed his role as grouse gamekeeper during the reign of Queen Victoria. Further up the scene changed to a battle between a Welsh and a Saxon knight on the hillside, fighting over 'their' land. The Welshman sent the Saxon 'back to his pitiful earthwork!' and he left defeated, back to England over Offa's Dyke. At the entrance to the hillfort, students were stopped by the Iron Age Hillfort Guard, demanding they explain their trespass!

To compliment the colourful re-enactments of the past, archaeologists from Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust brought artefacts dating back thousands of years. Students had the opportunity to handle the evidence and learn about archaeologists' work and why the heritage of the Clwydian Range AONB is so special.

Celtic tile making, Iron Age weaving, helmet and brooch making and 'woad' body painting was also enjoyed during these exciting two days.

Similar days are planned for Denbighshire Walking Festival - The Heather and Hillforts Challenge Week in September 2009. Visit www.denbighshirewalkingweek.com

A Window on 1950s Llanarmon and Llanferres

Sixth form students at Ysgol Brynhyfryd are working with community film makers, Lal and Huw Davies, to make a TV discussion-type programme contrasting the life of modern-day teenagers in Ruthin, with the lives of local teenagers in the 1940s and 50s.

This is the culmination of the W.H. Crawford Community film project that has been running since 2005, following the interest generated by showings of Mr Crawford's original cine-films.

Mr Crawford was a remarkable gentleman who had the foresight and expertise to make a series of cine-films during the 1940s and 1950s. His films contain a substantial amount of material about rural life at this time.

Sixteen students studying the Welsh Baccalaureate watched the original films and interviews and talked directly to some of the older residents. Each student then made their own short film about an aspect of modern-day teenage life in the Ruthin area. Volunteer students from the A level Media course decided to take it one stage further and produce a TV

discussion programme talking to older residents who had appeared in the original films of the 1950s about aspects of life today compared with 50 years ago.

Film maker Lal Davies summarises the project, *"We wanted to build on the students' previous experiences and create a TV studio atmosphere for them to work in. The students chose from roles such as presenter, interviewer, camera crew and assistant editors. We also had invaluable assistance in welcoming our guests and working studio lighting. We filmed a discussion style format that will be edited into two half-hour programmes. All the students rose impressively to the enormous challenges this project brought and the end result will be a great complement to the ongoing interpretation of the original W.H.Crawford footage."*

Brynhyfryd are the third local school to be involved in this exciting project that is funded by the Clwydian Range AONB Sustainable Development Fund, Cadwyn Clwyd and the Film Agency Wales.



Geodiversity education @ Loggerheads

The Loggerheads Geodiversity Education Pack, designed for key stage 2 and 3, is available in English and Welsh. It provides all that is needed for an enjoyable, instructive and memorable field-trip to explore the stunning geodiversity of Loggerheads Country Park.



The term geodiversity includes not only the rock, fossils and minerals but also the heritage of lead mining, quarrying, buildings as well as the landscape of Loggerheads and the Clwydian Range. The pack integrates the earth science with the landscape heritage and culture of Loggerheads and aims to stimulate discussion and thought.

The resources are based on practical field-work and allow teachers to tailor activities to the particular needs of their group of children. Although geology/geography is the main subject area, the resources are cross-curricular and include many aspects of science, earth science, maths, English/Welsh, history, art & ICT.

The resources are specifically designed to be used by teachers with little or no knowledge of geodiversity with background information about the park and its geodiversity as well as worksheets, guides to learning and ideas for preparation and post-visit work to enhance the visit. There is a free pre-visit pack that can be collected from Loggerheads

prior to the school visit to prepare the pupils and allow them to get the most out of their visit.

The pack is a free booklet available from Loggerheads, or downloadable from www.denbighshire.gov.uk/countryside or www.newrigs.org

Teachers are invited to teacher placement days at Loggerheads to familiarise themselves with the park and resources. These days, funded by Careers Wales, take place every term and are very popular.

The Loggerheads Geodiversity Education Pack has been produced in partnership with the Clwydian Range AONB, Denbighshire Countryside Service with Flintshire and Denbighshire County Councils and Arden Early Learning, with financial support from Welsh Assembly Government Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund and Countryside Council for Wales.