



FRIENDS OF SHIRTCLIFFE

*Newsletter No.72
December 2024*



Foreword

Dear All,

First of all, I have to apologise for the delay in publishing this newsletter. Family obligations are taking over my time, far more than anticipated.

FoS has been very busy over the last 8 months. The group has been collaborating with 'S13 Keep it Clean' and the Handsworth Roadhogs for a while now, with the help of the Park Rangers. Between us, we have managed to keep the paths through the Valley accessible and safe. The Valley is relatively free of litter, despite the efforts of the fly-tippers and cannabis farmers!

Together, we built an excellent flight of steps down from the Small Glade to the Western Grassland. We work well together as a team - I'm proud of us all.

We have several projects in mind for 2025.

- 1) Sue Smelt (S13) would like to clear the 'log flume' from the bottom of Smelter Wood. This is weather dependent, as the Brook is dangerous in heavy rain. She has consulted the Rangers, and a digger has been proposed.
- 2) The Grasslands need maintaining. This will involve an awful lot of Bramble Bashing - have your chainmail handy.
- 3) I would like to restore the Wetland below Severnside Drive, in the hope of alleviating the flooding across Beaver Hill Road. I have discussed this with Nick Blood. He suggests building 'leaky dams' in appropriate places. This will need careful planning, and a lot of hard work.
- 4) I would also like to stop the motor bikers destroying Calcium Corner, and riding through the bluebells in the Wood. Ideas, please! I am becoming quite paranoid about them.

Finally, I'm now 75 and having mobility problems - so 2025 is likely to be my swansong! I will probably act as co-ordinator for the time being, but the group is going to need a replacement. I would like to thank everybody for their support and friendship over the years. It has been a privilege to be in your company.

Love, Pat Howells.

Best Wishes, Pat and Mick Howells.

List of Officers

Secretary: Andrew Virgin

Treasurer & Acting Chair: Pat Howells (fos@friendsofshirtcliffe.co.uk)

Friends of Shirtcliffe Website and Facebook Page

Please note: Andrew Virgin is now supporting the Facebook Page. (*Thanks, Andrew.*)

Visit and “Like” us on the Facebook page: www.facebook.com/FriendsofShirtcliffe

You can ‘spread the word’, ‘like’, ‘share’ and ‘comment’ on FOS posts and activities.

Fettling the Valley Bottom Path 11th May 2024

Report by Pat Howells:

There were 4 volunteers (Pat, Sue, Tony, and Gareth) under the supervision of Tom Collier, the Ranger. We had intended to tidy up the Valley Bottom Path all the way from Calcium Corner to Schubert Bridge. However, the path between Calcium Corner and Severnside Drive was still too wet for us to walk on.

So, we limited ourselves to working from the Meadow to Schubert Bridge. It was actually quite pleasant ambling along, snipping a branch here and a briar there (we did try to be efficient!). Along the way, we found several dead Ash saplings – they had succumbed to ‘Ash dieback’. All we could do was cut them right down and leave them to rot.



Within Shirtcliffe Woods, the Bluebells were just going over – but the fragrance still lingered. The Wild Garlic almost covered the Valley floor. I have never seen such an extensive covering – it was like a thick blanket of freshly fallen snow.

The path through the woods was still quite muddy in places, despite the floodwaters have been drained away.

There were one or two logs in the Brook. We left them to be moved later. (I noted that one of the logs had Chicken of the Wood growing on it.)

The burnt-out car was still in the wood below the Old Wall. Hauling the carcass out is going to be difficult (I think they may have to cut the wreck into pieces!).

It was a restful stroll, but we actually accomplished quite a lot. (Personally, I’m all in favour of restful things!)



Wildlife Note:

*We found an unusual beetle on a tall stump, on the Handsworth side of the Main Path not far from the New Footbridge. It was a Black-Headed Cardinal Beetle (*Pyrochroa coccinea*). These are not common in the Sheffield area – it was the highlight of our day!*

*Incidentally, 5 days later Sue found a Red-Headed Cardinal Beetle (*Pyrochroa serraticornis*) in her car outside her house.*

Both these sightings have been submitted to the Sheffield Database.



Handsworth Hobble Trail Race 25th June 2024

Report by Tony Weightman:

*(Secretary of Handsworth Roadhogs Running Club,
and Organiser of the Handsworth Hobble Trail Race)*

Handsworth Roadhogs Running Club staged their annual Handsworth Hobble trail race on the evening of Tuesday, 25th June 2024. As usual, the Club used the Old Crown pub as the base, and as in previous years the race was held over the well-established two lap course comprising more or less the perimeter of the Shirtcliffe Valley area. The route, with the start on Grange Lane, has a small starting and finishing loop from the field at the rear of Handsworth Church and on the track by the Paddocks. This is prior to undertaking two laps of the main circuit.

The main circuit takes in paths leading to the Bramley Avenue Entrance, before heading through the Small Glade and down to Shirtcliffe Brook. It then follows the Brook, before going over the new wooden bridge. Now comes a climb through the south side of Shirtcliffe Wood, before dropping down to the Beaver Hill Road Entrance. Then comes a serious climb back up towards the Paddocks before doing the second lap!

The path in the field behind Handsworth Church that we have traditionally used up to the finish of the race has finally proved to be too difficult to keep clear of vegetation. So instead, for this race, the course went down Grange Lane to the public footpath that runs diagonally across the field. As this is a Designated Public Right of Way, it is very helpfully maintained by Sheffield Council. It is likely that this will be a permanent change to the Hobble/Cross Country course.

We were again lucky with the weather on the race day, as it was a dry and warm summer evening - ideal conditions for running. The Roadhogs marked the course with tape and had many marshals on the course as well, so there were a lot of people in Shirtcliffe valley that evening. Two qualified First Aiders were present - although it is very good to know that a cut to a knee following a fall by a runner was the only injury reported.

Janet Lees, the landlady and all the staff at the Old Crown, are thanked for their efforts on that busy evening. Also, for allowing us to use the courtyard at the rear of the pub for an hour or so after the race to declare the results and hand out some prizes.

Entries for the race were again taken online before the race day. This really helps to give us an indication of likely numbers on race day. We had 85 runners enter in the race, mostly from other local running clubs. Unfortunately, the Hobble was on the same evening as an important England football match and this affected the attendance, particularly from runners not attached to a club.

Once again, there were many complimentary comments from the runners at the Hobble (and from friends/relations who came to support the runners) about the condition of the course and the general area. The Roadhogs are very appreciative of the work of Pat Howells and the Friends in maintaining the valley and keeping it free of litter. It continues to be an attractive area for our Members to run in. It also enables the Club to stage the Hobble and the Winter Cross Country event in the lovely, well- maintained open spaces and woods.

Mention must also be made of the excellent support received from Nick Blood, James Smith and all the Countryside Rangers. They work with the Friends throughout the year to undertake jobs in the Shirtcliffe Valley. Both the Friends and the Rangers greatly help the Roadhogs stage the Hobble by giving time to prepare the paths used for the race.

The Roadhogs are aiming to stage the Hobble again on Tuesday, 24th June 2025 and the Winter Inter Club Cross Country on Sunday, 2nd February 2025.

Tidying round Severnside Walk 12th June 2024

Report by Sue Smelt (S13 Keep it Clean):



As the prolific spring and summer growth in hedgerows and woodlands makes litter picking more difficult, a tidy up at the entrance to the woods off Severnside Walk seemed to be a good choice for the above event.

Julian, David M, and David H disappeared to collect as much rammel as they could from the top of the wood, and from the area just on the other side of the gates. Tony also came along to help.

After a discussion with Nick about checking for nesting birds, Andrew set about giving the overgrown shrubs and trees a good chop! Not only were they darkening and obstructing the footpath, they were also concealing a lot of litter which had become trapped beneath.



We tried out some of new S13 Keep it Clean equipment (courtesy of a grant from the SELAC Environmental Projects Fund), which proved to be very useful and sharp! *It would have been even better if Sue had remembered the blade for the saw, but she did charge the battery up - some you win, some you lose!*

Sue and David H dragged the branches down the footpath and chopped them up so Nick could fill the trailer (which he seemed to do in no time at all). He decided to take this away first and return for the remainder later. After a good sweep up of the footpath with our beast of a brush, all that remained was for us to move the fly tipping and bags to Severnside Drive. This made it easier for Nick to collect.



All in all, another satisfying outcome - with grateful thanks to those who gave their time to help.

Balsam Pull 13th July 2024

Report by Pat Howells:

A local walker had reported an invasion of Himalayan Balsam on the gabions at Schubert Bridge. He had tried to clear some of it himself, but it had proved too much for him.



Sue and I, under the supervision of Bob Chowdry (Ranger), spent 2 hours doing battle with the monstrous horde.

The Balsam hadn't limited itself to the gabions – it had started to climb the slope up to Woodhouse as well!

The 3 of us just picked a spot each and started pulling. Bob was on the gabions, I was in the middle, and Sue set about clearing the aforementioned slope.



After 2 hours of toil, 3 huge piles had been amassed – each one almost my height! The number of Balsam plants had been substantially reduced, but we had done as much as we could (unfortunately, there were more of them than there were of us!).

It's a pity really, the Balsam flowers are so pretty. However, it is very invasive and nothing native to Britain eats it. It is exceedingly fertile – its seeds are fired out of exploding capsules and thus spread easily. It will even put down roots along a prostrate stem, so flattening it just helps it to form a thicket!

Pulling the Balsam will have to be repeated, in Spring, for at least 3 years – there will be viable seeds lurking in the earth ready to make a comeback.

Small Glade Survey 16th August 2024

Led by Pat Howells:

Over the past couple of years, we have seen devastating floods through the Shirtcliffe Valley. I realised that a survey was needed to find out what damage had been done, and what flora and fauna had been lost.

Sue Smelt is keen to develop a knowledge of plants. I had a word with her and we agreed that doing a simple survey of a small area would be a good way to start. My 10-year-old grandson, Sam, was very keen to join in – it's always useful to have a young pair of eyes around. Mick would come along to act as photographer.



The four of us would spend a couple of hours in the Small Glade on the eastern side of Smelter Wood. The Glade is on top of an old coal mine and spoil heap, and it has its own specialised grassland (Grid Ref: SK 4080 8559).



First, we checked out the plants growing round the Bramley Avenue access gate. There was a patch of Ivy-Leaved Cyclamen in full bloom, along with stands of Garden Angelica and Hogweed. Sam spotted 3 Speckled Wood butterflies having a battle above these plants. He also spied a Grey Squirrel up high in a Sycamore.

We joined the path into the Small Glade, passing by a large patch of Ragwort. Nearby were 2 species of ferns (Common Male and Broad Buckler), as well as several large patches of Thyme-leaved Speedwell.

Within the Glade, the vegetation was disappointing. Despite the best efforts of FoS, the grassland is being taken over by Brambles and False Oat Grass. Most of the specialised plants are still there, but they are steadily being squeezed out by taller vegetation. However, we did find Birds-Foot Trefoil (*Lotus* sp.) and Broadleaved Hawkweed.



We spotted Lesser Marsh Grasshoppers in the grass. Despite an abundance of flowers, we only managed to find 2 bees (Buff-Tailed Bumbles) - *I find this quite worrying!* Note: Mick photographed an interesting looking wasp-like insect which turned out to be a Rose Sawfly, which we hadn't seen in the Valley before.



As usual, the pools along the north-west edge had dried up, but the Compact Rushes surrounding them were still going strong. One of the Rush seedheads had some intriguing white tubes sticking out – we managed to identify them as the larval cases of a micromoth *Coleothora alticolella*.

On the Rush seed head there was also a tiny brown insect. We needed expert help to identify the beastie. We would like to thank Jim Flanagan, the Sorby Het Bug Recorder, for his invaluable assistance. He identified it for us as a Seed Bug Nymph (*a Lygaeid*).

At this point, our 2 hours were up. We exchange compliments with the large grey and white Tabby Moggy lurking in the undergrowth, and turned to leave.

Suddenly, Sam started bouncing up and down and pointing up into the sky. There was a Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*) flying low over our heads, just above tree-top height. Presumably, it had a nest somewhere within Smelter Wood, and had just set out to hunt. Serendipitous or what!

It was a pleasant outing, and relatively productive. We recorded around 80 species – a goodly achievement.

Flight of Steps Project – Parts 1 & 2

Report by Pat Howells:

There is a flight of steps running down from the Small Glade to the Western Grassland. These steps were just rough ones cut into the earth of the slope. They were adequate in dry weather, but when wet they became a liability. However, the Handsworth Road Hogs made do with them for both the Winter Run and the Handsworth Hobble.

After some discussion between Friends of Shirtcliffe, Handsworth Roadhogs, 'S13 Keep it Clean', and the Rangers, it was decided to put in a proper flight of steps. Friends of Shirtcliffe would pay for the materials, which the Rangers would source. The Rangers would also provide the proper equipment and oversee the work.



Building the steps took two workdays:

Day One (14th September 2024) was used to build the actual staircase – comprising the following stages:

- Trenches were dug to take the long side pieces
- The side pieces were put in place and carefully aligned to make sure they were parallel
- The top and bottom Risers were bolted into place after many precise measurements. Extreme care was needed as this 'frame' set the positioning for the rest of the risers.
- It was then possible to work from the top and bottom simultaneously to place the rest of the risers
- Treads were formed by infilling with earth to the level of each riser, and tamping it down until it was firm



All this was very hard work. The slope is composed of hard white clay and coal spoil. The ground had to be broken up with iron bars before the trenches could be dug out. The group divided into 2 teams, as it was essential to put in the top and bottom risers at the same time. Sue, Tony, Nick, and Gareth worked from the bottom up. Andrew and Matthew worked from the top down. All the work had to be as accurate as possible, which meant checking and double-checking everything. Despite the efforts they had to put in, they worked cheerfully and with determination.



Meanwhile, Julian and I were on light duties. So, the two of us spent 2 hours cutting back the brambles which were encroaching around the top of the steps. (We would have preferred to have joined the others!)

Sadly, because of my health problems, I had to leave at around 3:30. However the rest of the gang, including Julian, remained until they had finished the job (around 4:30).

I'm really proud of how well they all worked together. It was obvious that they were all enjoying the 'creative process' and were determined that it should be done properly.



Day Two (9th November 2024) was used to add on the handrail:

Julian, Andrew, Tony, Dave, and Nick were tasked with assembling the handrail. They got very dirty – typical British understatement!

- First, holes were dug to take the uprights. The holes had to be well over a foot deep – see photo of Dave with his head down one of the holes!
- The hefty uprights were cut to length (defined as the required height of the handrail plus the allowance for the depth of the hole). *Out of interest, Nick decided that the handrail should end up the same height as Pat's waist!*
- The handrail had to be attached to the top of the uprights.



Digging the holes and putting in the uprights was hard work and took a long time. Most of the uprights were put in, and part of the handrail duly attached.

Unfortunately, the light started fading around 3 PM and it wasn't sensible to continue. Nick said that he and his apprentice would finish off the work during the week. Meanwhile, Pat, Gareth, and Sue spent their time clearing back the brambles at the top of the steps. They opened up quite a large area, scraping away the clippings and the dead leaves beneath the plants. This uncovered the shoots of

Willowherbs, which had been hidden by the dead layer. They also discovered a large patch of Spearpoint Moss. There used to be a real carpet of this in the Glade – it's good to see that this has survived.

Someone had dumped a large black wheelie bin amongst the trees in the back edge. Gareth managed to pull this bin out. He also found the remains of a den some kids had made (poles and a large woven blue plastic sheet). He removed that as well.



It was a satisfying afternoon all round. Even if the handrail wasn't completed, the promise is there.

The bare patch, which was under the brambles, will end up covered with mosses and grasses – probably by Spring. There should be wildflowers as well.



The Finished Article



Flockton Park Blitz 11th December 2024



Sue Smelt and some of the other 'S13 Keep it Clean' Team decided to have a pre-Christmas bash at clearing up on Flockton Park. This was particularly necessary around the Goathland Drive area.

They found an interesting assortment of rubbish; such as car tyres and an armchair. However, the most astonishing find was a dump of over 200 poo bags (full!). *We wondered if the Guinness Book of Records has a category for this substance?*

Nick's van was completely filled (and somewhat fragrant!) by the end of the session.



Wildlife Notes:

Meadow Brown Butterfly

Maniola jurtina



A very dark male. At first, we thought it was a Ringlet, until we noticed the orange at the tips of the wings.

Green Leafhopper

Cicadella viridis



Only a tiny insect, but such a pretty colour. We just had to put it in!

Batman Hoverfly

Myathropa florea



A fairly common Hoverfly in wooded areas. They feed on pollen and nectar of a range of flowers.

Schedule of Events 2025

Ranger-supervised Workdays

The week before each workday, FoS Officers undertake a Risk Assessment walk. If you spot any problems in the meantime, please let one of the committee members know.

Sue's Litter Team work days: all on Wednesdays.

Sue takes regular walks around the district, checking for fly-tipping hotspots and general littering. Depending on what she finds, and after discussion with the S13 Group, a plan of action is agreed. Sue then organises the necessary tasks with her team, as well as making sure that equipment is provided. She also arranges for the collected rubbish to be taken away as soon as possible.

<u>FoS Workdays</u> All on Saturdays, 1pm to 3pm Leader: Pat Howells		<u>S13 – Keep it Clean Workdays</u> All on Wednesdays 10am to Noon Leader: Susan Smelt	
February 1 st	Fettle Smelter Wood	January 8 th	- deferred due to flooding
March 29 th	Vicar Lane Scrapedown	March 5 th	- to be announced
May 24 th	Checking Valley Paths	April 30 th	- to be announced
July 19 th	To be Announced	June 25 th	- to be announced
September 13 th	To be Announced	October 15 th	- to be announced
November 8 th	Tidy Bridleway	December 10 th	- to be announced

- 1) Please Note: There are no workdays in August, as this is the holiday period.*
- 2) There are some Multi-Agency Site Visits planned for Tithebarn, Severnside, and Richmond Park. These will take place on 22nd January 2025. Details to be announced.*

Handsworth Roadhogs Events (arranged by Tony Weightman):

Sunday 2nd February 2025, Winter Inter- Club Cross Country Run

Tuesday 24th June 2025, The Handsworth Hobble

The meeting point will be the Sports Field below Handsworth Church.

Start time to be announced - check the Roadhogs website for the latest information.

Please Note: Tony Weightman will make arrangements with The Rangers to prepare the course for the Hobble, to ensure the safety and well-being of the runners.

We can tell it's Winter ...