

Mendip Society looks to the future

After more than 50 years the Mendip Society has a new lease of life. With increasing membership and a strong programme of events and activities, it looks forward to expanding its work preserving and promoting what's best about the Mendip Hills. Judith Tranter and chairman, Richard Frost, report.



Hedge laying group with Tina Bath at Tania's Wood

BACK in 1965 a group of like-minded people, calling themselves Mendip Preservation Society got together to oppose a planning application to extend a quarry at Bleadon Hill at a time when rampant quarrying was eating into our hills leaving scars and pollution.

People of all ages and from all walks of life were deeply concerned for the historical, archaeological and natural features of this unique area. It led to the formation of the Mendip Society, registered charity No 262867.

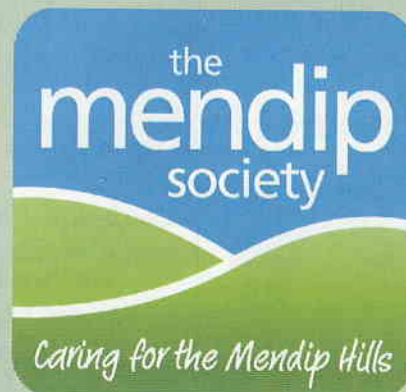
Our motto is "Caring for the Mendip Hills"; this we aim to live up to with a programme of recreation and education backed up with walks, talks and visits. Co-operation with the Mendip Hills AONB and the Council for the Protection of Rural England, plus others, helps to encourage responsible use of the countryside.

Our Heritage Fund helps to maintain important sites such as Smitham's Chimney, the Charterhouse Flues and the sheep hurdle stack on Priddy Green together with our two nature reserves at Slader's Leigh, Winscombe and Tania's Wood, Ubley. Our representatives sit on the Strawberry Line management committee and help oversee local planning matters that may seriously affect the working and community lives of a great many local residents and families.

Our policy of conservation attempts to balance the existence of ancient historical and archaeological features against the needs and pressures coming from modern living. We all require housing, transport and social amenities – and we all benefit from local industry, farming and tourism and it is one of our aims to work with others to ensure that we can have some sort of harmonious development where all this can be achieved.

When we are not being too serious, we arrange a mixed programme of social events to reflect our aims and aspirations. We cater for both indoor and outdoor activities for all ages and our regular Saturday walking programme is very successful and always well supported.

We are delighted that this year we will be a major sponsor of The Mendip Rocks Festival which is to be held throughout October. This popular local event has been growing steadily over the past few years, and so this year's programme is now anticipated with enthusiasm within the society.



As a charitable society, we are also charged with looking after the fabric of the countryside and to this end members who are able to, offer their time and effort where practical tasks are called for, not only in our own nature reserves but on land belonging to other organisations, most usually where the public have access. We offer training in the countryside skills in which every country worker was once proficient – hedge laying, coppicing, dry stone and lime mortared walling, and more recently, charcoal burning.

Thus we are able to do the necessary work ourselves but we are also keeping alive, by passing on, the countryside skills and traditions which have made the Mendip Hills its own unique place. Just this month our trainee hedging group made a start on the boundary hedge of Tania's Wood, the lovely piece of land in Ubley which was gifted to us by Glyn England, a late president of the society.

Little did they know- until they started work on it – that this particular stretch of hedge has been growing there for over 800 years and was once the boundary to a medieval deer park.

In future issues of *Mendip Times* we hope to share with you the Mendip Society's view on the life of the Mendip Hills through our commitments, participation, activities and events. Every society has an AGM to pull all the threads together and report goings-on to the members and ours is no exception. Our AGM will be on Friday March 31st in the Wells and Mendip Museum at 7pm.

Then at 8.30pm we will be welcoming Prof. Danielle Schreve of Royal Holloway University, London as our speaker. Together with a small group of colleagues and students she is leading a current dig high up in Ebbor gorge near the top of a gully running down from the Mendip plateau.

They have been excavating there for two weeks every summer for ten years and have uncovered what is likely to be the most complete fossil record in Britain, showing how fauna responded to abrupt climate change at the end of the last ice age and into the early part of the current warm stage (interglacial), roughly from 15,000 to 8,000 years ago.

Last summer the society was invited to visit the dig site and we found it most fascinating; Prof Schreve's talk to us will bring us up-to-date with this exciting project. Non-members who would like to hear Prof. Schreve are invited to join us for the evening.

Details: pick up a programme from the local library, call 08454 092951, email membership@mendipsociety.org.uk or go to www.mendipsociety.org.uk