



Friends of Combe Valley

Annual Report

for the Year October 2020 to September 2021



Friends of Combe Valley

Combe Valley Countryside Park

Café & Discovery Centre

Freshfields, Bexhill,

East Sussex, TN38 8FB

website: www.friendsofcombevalley.co.uk

email: team@friendsofcombevalley.co.uk

Friends of Combe Valley is a Registered (in England) Charity Number: 1163581

Friends of Combe Valley

Annual Report for the Year October 2020 to September 2021

1. Introduction

- The year started with the worry about an impending lock down, which limited our activities and meetings, although we adapted to meeting on zoom and were able to do planning for the spring and summer
- In spite of the continuing difficulties everyone has faced this year, we have been able to continue to develop our activities and our plans as well as developing our relationship with the Combe Valley Countryside Park CIC (CIC), for whom our chair Pete Clarke is the vice-chair and their agents for the park of Groundwork South (GWS), in particular Lindy Kelly their executive director.
- Our membership has continued to increase and is now over 70 and although we have not been able to arrange any events for members we have been able to keep in touch by email, and in particular invite members to join us in various activities within the park, which are described below.

2. Volunteers

- With the lifting of the lock down provisions in the spring we started up regular Thursday work mornings and this has brought in a number of new members and volunteers with groups of 10 to 15 every Thursday morning
- Volunteers are the life blood of our organisation and it is through their contributions over the year that we have been able to achieve so much over the year.



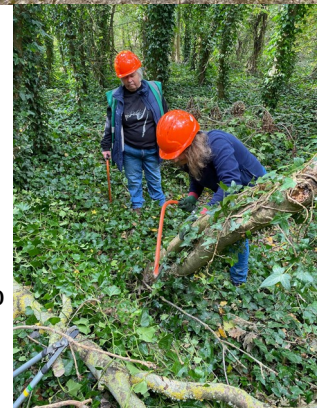
3. Activities

- **Path clearing:**



Our first outing with volunteers was in March when on Saturday March 20 we joined with the Crowhurst Environmental Group to clear the permissive path beside the Powder Mill Stream from Marker Post 14, close to where the 1066 Country Walk crosses the Greenway, and loops down to the South East to the Combe Haven footpath.

Further work has been done as required to clear small trees which have fallen in the various storms.



- **Litter picks**

On June 19 about a dozen volunteers joined forces to clean the stretch of coast between the site of the Amsterdam wreck and Little Galley Hill, all of which falls within the boundary of the countryside park.

On September 18 about fifteen volunteers joined the National Coast and Park Clean, to collect litter round the Discovery Centre, covering the recreation grounds, the long wood and the sides of the Gorrington Stream as well as the path from Freshfields towards Pebsham and down to the Pebsham Lake.

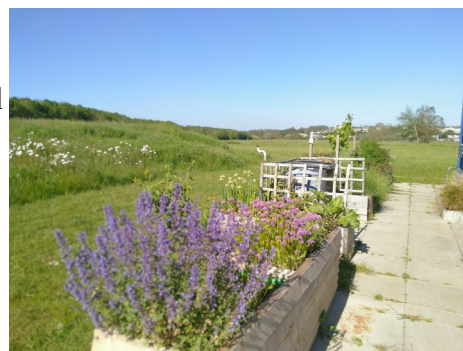
- **Wild flower mound:**



Next to the Discovery Centre is a mound made from waste excavated to create the adjoining car park. It was covered with grass and not of any particular interest. In the Autumn of 2020 we started to think about turning it into a wild flower meadow and volunteers scythed several areas, as a start to preparing areas on the mound for seeds: in the spring these areas were cleared back and covered with a mulch of cardboard, a mixture of soil and sand and then seeded with wild flower seed mixes, one of annuals and one mainly perennials.

With funding provided from the Co-op Community Fund we were able to expand the project and buy wild-flower turf, which was easy to lay, once we had managed to clear the grass and roots. Following several weeks of regular watering, the meadow developed well. It has encouraged more people to visit the area and enjoy it.

The meadow has attracted many varieties of insects, including many different species of bees and butterflies.



Annual and perennial wild Flowers currently identified on the meadow: Black eyed Susan, Rudbeckia Hart, Sea Holly, Eryngium, Planum, Yarrow, Schiller, Millefolium, Yellow Ox eye, Buphthalmum, Salicfolium. Red, pink and white Poppies, Cornflower, Marigold, Red flax, Fennel, Scabious, Cosmos, Escolcia, maidenhair fern, Birds-Foot Trefoil, Greater Knapweed, Purple Loosestrife, Kidney Vetch, Viper's Bugloss, Wild Marjoram, Borage, Red Champion, Common Vetch.

In August and September we created 2 raised beds on the western end of the mound, to be used for horticultural training and also a niche on the eastern side to take two benches, with some shelter from the wind.



- **Schools Project: *Helping local communities connect with nature***

With support from the Police, we have established a free educational programme called Nature Detectives, that aims to connect local communities in Bexhill and Hastings with the amazing wildlife that is found on their doorstep in the Combe Valley Countryside Park which it should be noted includes the beach from West St Leonards to Bexhill. The aim is to inspire local children and their families with a life-long love of nature and help develop a passion to protect and look after their local wild places.



Within the period covered by this report, 2 sessions have been delivered over the school summer holidays,. They have been targeted towards children aged 4 to 16, although both younger and older children have also attended. A total of about 30 children with accompanying family members attended. Both sessions have been very well received by those participating and we have had very positive feedback from participants.



These educational sessions have been carefully planned and delivered by a qualified teacher with a broad background in and knowledge of natural history, environmental science and wildlife conservation, alongside other knowledgeable and committed members. Original resources have been made in order to engage and capture children's interest and a variety of activities have been on offer to ensure that these sessions are engaging, meaningful and fun.



Activities with a focus on natural history and ecology alongside art and craft and group games with a wildlife theme have been enjoyed by participating families.

The first session was held on Saturday 23rd July 2021 and was based at the Discovery Centre on the Bulverhythe between Bexhill and St Leonards on Sea, with a focus on the nature and wildlife of woodlands and meadows.

The second session was held on Saturday 14th August on the beach at Glyne Gap and focused on the nature and wildlife of the coastal environment, with a focus on the intertidal zone including rockpools, and the fabulous wildlife of the vegetated shingle and cliff-top habitats. Since then a session was held on Saturday October 23, in and around the wood by the Discovery Centre. Further sessions will be delivered in the New Year, including ones for older children.

- **Container and equipment**

With funding from the Police, Rother District Council and the Chalk Cliff Trust we have been able to purchase tools and other equipment for working in the park, including very high quality saws, loppers, secateurs etc for use in the park as well as safety equipment and also woodworking tools to enable us to use wood from the park to build benches and other furniture for the park.



With the additional equipment which we have been able to buy, we have run out of space in the Discovery Centre and with the support of grants from the Police and the agreement of the Combe Valley Countryside Park CIC, we are in the process of acquiring a container to store equipment. Hastings BC have agreed to it being placed in the corner of the car park and the planning application to Rother DC is expected to be dealt with in December this year. We hope that we will have a container in place and in use by early 2022.

- **Security in the park**

There has been particular concern about the use of trail bikes within the park, which causes disturbance to wild life and is also noisy and unpleasant for other users of the park. The activity is not permitted in the park area, except with the consent of the landowners. To discourage the use of trail bikes three kissing gates are to be installed on the eastern side of the park: following negotiations, it has been agreed that we will purchase the gates, with funds which we have received from the police, and two will be installed by East Sussex County Council who have responsibility for the footpaths, and the third, which is to be located at the entrance to Filsham Reed Bed from Reedswood Road will be installed by the Combe Valley Countryside Park CIC. This should be done in early 2022.

- **Information and Interpretation Boards**

We have been conscious for some time that the notice boards at the entrances to the park are out of date and in many cases have been defaced with graffiti or simply disappeared. In addition we would like to see more boards providing information about the flora and fauna as well as the history of the park.

We intend that the boards at the entrance to the park should also contain notices from the Police about anti-social and illegal activities.

Funding for this has been received from the Police as well as Hastings Direct and we are now working with Combe Valley Countryside Park CIC and Groundwork South on the design and installation of the boards.

- **Geocache**

Geocache boasts of being the worlds largest treasure hunt, more details are available on their site <https://www.geocaching.com> . Julie and Elise were invited by England's Creative Coast to be involved in helping create a trail of geocaches from Harwich to Eastbourne, with a geocache in Combe Valley Countryside Park which has been done on our behalf. Information about this particular cache is at <https://www.englandscreativecoast.com/geocaching/geocache-hastings-contemporary-combe-haven/> and the site has information on the other caches involved in the project.

- **i-tree Project**



We were asked to take part in this project which has been established by Rother District Council, and involves a survey of trees within the urban area of Bexhill and the countryside immediately adjoining Bexhill. This includes the countryside park and Hastings BC agreed that the part of the park in Hastings should be included.

The survey involves making a count of trees and shrubs within plots which are allocated randomly by a computer program. The plots are a circle 11 metres in diameter and the trees are identified, their height, circumference of the trunk and the width of

the canopy are measured and their condition is noted.

50 plots were identified in the park and a small group were trained to carry out the surveys which were done in August and September.

The results of all the surveys are now with the project leaders and being fed into a data base, which will then be analysed electronically to give a picture of tree cover in the area as well as forming the basis for planning for tree planting in the future and providing a base line for further surveys in the future.



4. Wardens

- Since late 2020, with funding from the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner we have run a warden service in the park: David Dennis who was instrumental in establishing the service has retired. Pete Clarke, our chair, and Chris Dadswell our vice-chair have taken over the role of coordinating the service. In addition to Pete and Chris there are 4 other wardens.
- The park has been divided into roughly 5 sections, with wardens having particular sections to visit on a regular basis. Any problems whether natural, such as branches falling, or man-made, such as litter, fly-tipping, anti-social behaviour are reported to Pete or Chris and either passed on to the volunteers to deal with or to the authorities.
- We were able to continue with the activities throughout the lock down, because the wardens were operating individually and we hope to re-start making regular reports in the new year..

5. Cafe and Discovery Centre

- In April the Discovery Centre was inspected for safety purposes, in particular fire and electricity standards. Works have been required including replacing doors and the hatch to the kitchen to a higher fire door standard. It has been difficult to get this work done, because of lock-down and the subsequent difficulties about supplies. However the works are now done and the centre can start to be used again.

- As a result the cafe has been closed since March 2020. In the intervening period the number of volunteers available to help has diminished and if we are to re-open we need more helpers to organise and provide the service.

6. Administration

● Trustees

Following our last AGM Pete Clarke continued as chair and Karl Beaney, Stevie Collins, Chris Dadswell, David Dennis, Will Kemp and Rebecca Nolan continued in office. William Ackroyd, Cliff Willard and Elise Liversedge were elected trustees.

During the year Stevie Collins, David Dennis and Rebecca Nolan resigned and the other trustees acknowledge their help and contribution to our work.

In particular we remember Rebecca Nolan who died in October after a long struggle with cancer.

During the year we co opted Emma Ramsden and Anna Sabin to be trustees.

● Website:

our website address is www.friendsofcombevalley.co.uk.

It includes an email address team@friendsofcombevalley.co.uk

We are redeveloping the website, since the version which we established in 2019 has proved expensive to maintain and in some respects does not work very well.

7. Fundraising:

We are very grateful for the support we have received for our work:

- Cooperative Community Fund: its members in the area raised over £2,800 for us through their shopping at the co-op. This funded the work on the rewilding of the mound and there is some money left for further work around the Discovery Centre
- Hastings Direct have given us a grant for signs in the park and we are discussing how best to use this with the CIC and GWS.
- The Chalk Cliff Trust and Rother Community Fund have given us funding for tools
- The Police have provided funding for the warden service and related equipment as well as the schools project.

8. The future

- We hope to continue to develop our relationship with the Combe Valley Countryside Park CIC and Groundwork South in expanding our work in the park.
- We are working on an art trail project, to develop art works at different sites in the park.
- We hope to continue with the work of landscaping round the Discovery Centre
- We plan to open the cafe at times to be discussed.

9. Conclusion

- Although it has continued to be difficult with coronavirus and all the complications resulting from that, we have consolidated our membership, advanced some of our projects and are hopeful for the future
- and thanks are due to our members, our volunteers, the wardens as well as the committee and Pete Clarke our chair: with a particular note for Teresa Clarke who supplies the volunteers with her home made cakes and sausage rolls every Thursday morning.

- We also appreciated that Rother Voluntary Action selected Pete Clarke as one of their outstanding volunteers of the year, which he attributed to the work of all the volunteers of Friends of Combe Valley

William Ackroyd and other trustees

30 November 2021

