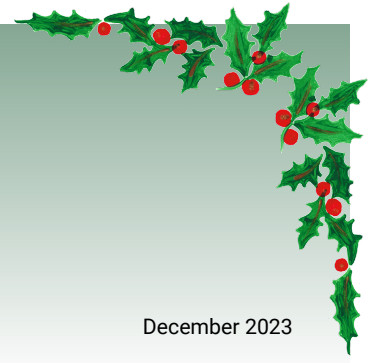




**Quantock
Hills
National
Landscape**

Winter Newsletter - Issue 20

December 2023



IN THIS ISSUE:

National
Landscapes

Year 2 of FiPL

Quantock
Apprentices

Annual Deer
Rut

Disabled
Ramblers

Nature
Recovery

Word Search

Book Sales

Contact Page

A new name for AONBs

**Iain Porter
Manager**

On Wednesday 22 November 2023 all designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in England and Wales became National Landscapes, including the Quantock Hills National Landscape.

The new name reflects their national importance, the vital contribution they make to protect the nation from the threats of climate change, nature depletion and the wellbeing crisis, whilst also creating greater understanding and awareness for the work that they do.

This is a significant milestone for the UK and the next step in fully realising the National Landscapes' vision to be the leading exemplars of how thriving, diverse communities can work with and for nature in the UK: restoring ecosystems, providing food, storing carbon to mitigate the effects of climate change, safeguarding against drought and flooding, whilst also nurturing people's health and wellbeing.

National Landscapes teams have been at the forefront of delivering natural solutions to the main challenges facing the nation for many years. The new brand underscores their commitment to redoubling their efforts and engaging with a wider audience. In 2019, teams set themselves the most ambitious targets for nature in the sector and continue to work to meet them.

By 2030, National Landscapes aim that, within their boundaries: at least 200,000 hectares of the most valuable natural areas (Sites of Special Scientific Interest or SSSIs), which equates to 1 ¼ times the size of London, will be in favourable condition; 100,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat outside of SSSIs will be created or restored, which is roughly nine times the size of Manchester; and 36,000 hectares of woodland, which is a little smaller than the Isle of Wight, will have been planted or allowed to regenerate. National Landscapes Partnerships will also focus on habitat restoration to ensure the protection of some of our most endangered species and increase their work to help more people to enjoy time spent in beautiful places.

Because of their size and scope, National Landscapes are ideally positioned to address the environmental issues the UK is facing. There are 46 National Landscapes in the UK, covering 14% of England, Wales and Northern Ireland including moorland, farmland, coast, forests, including UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Biosphere Reserves, a Geopark and International Dark Sky Reserves. They are the UK's nearby countryside - 66% of people in England (44 million) live within 30 minutes of a National Landscape and at least 170 million people visit them every year.

Since our designation in 1956 (England's first) the Quantock Hills has inspired and enthralled our communities and visitors alike. Renaming to National Landscapes reflects the importance and value we place on these special areas and empower us all to deliver more for nature and climate, for our heritage and culture and for the people who live and work here.

Tony Juniper, Chair of Natural England said:

"For decades the AONB's have helped protect the beauty of our finest landscapes. Today though we need so much more from these wonderful places, helping us adapt to climate change, catching carbon, restoring depleted wildlife and encouraging more people outside, at the same time as producing food, sustaining local communities and enhancing historic environments.



Modern challenges require new approaches and today marks the beginning of a new phase for our National Landscapes, as they strengthen their existing partnerships, and forge new ones that will secure in perpetuity the huge range of benefits that come from these special places. Big change has taken place during the past 75 years and bigger changes still can be expected during the decades ahead. Uniting the National Landscapes in this way is very welcome and spells immense opportunity and great hope for the future."

Farming in Protected Landscapes - Year 2 update

Katie Read

Landscape Projects Officer

In April, it was announced that the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme (FiPL) is being extended for one year to March 2025, and also receiving a funding uplift. This is very exciting and reflects the success of the programme so far, but also means we need to scale up our ambition and output to deliver FiPL in the Quantock Hills.

We have so far allocated nearly £340,000 to 42 projects, promoting the resilience of sustainable land management across the Quantock Hills. This has included support to establish new enterprises such as a micro-dairy and a mushroom farm; actions to promote climate change resilience on farms, such as composting trials, reducing reliance on inputs and improving natural soil fertility; conservation and restoration of 6 heritage features; and investment in nearly 2.5km of hedgerows, including trialling the planting of new disease-resistant Elm varieties.



Photo © Phyllida Warmington

We have also been getting out and about with members of the new Greater Quantocks Regenerative Farming Cluster and holding public events to connect communities with their food producers and land managers. The new cluster group has emerged from the ambition demonstrated by farmers across the Quantock Hills to respond to the climate crisis and promote sustainable food systems thriving alongside nature. Members recently attended a two-day course on soil health led by the Farm Carbon Toolkit and will be meeting in January to explore the challenges and opportunities of outwintering cattle. Through our public events, woodland managers, organic vegetable producers and coastal arable farmers have so far opened their gates to show members of the public how they manage their land and why. We're looking forward to holding more of these events in the new year – watch this space!

The FiPL programme was further expanded in October to include a new sub-scheme: Historic Building Restoration Grants. There is an additional £5 million available nationally to support the conservation of pre-1940 buildings requiring structural repairs, re-roofing, and weatherproofing.



FiPL is being assessed by external evaluators to understand whether it is successfully engaging farmers, developing collaborative partnerships, and delivering ambitious projects for Climate, Nature, People and Place. Their interim report was published in October and found that FiPL has many unique strengths that promote these aims: on-the-ground support from dedicated staff, built-in flexibility, the ability to fund activities that aren't eligible in other programmes, support towards short-term projects, and reliable grant payments.

As we approach the final year of the programme, we are still eager to develop new projects, with nearly £180,000 in funding still available. We can support a broad range of activities that aren't eligible in other agricultural support schemes, as long as there is a benefit to climate change resilience, biodiversity, or the cultural and historic character of the landscape. If you're a farmer or land manager who could benefit from FiPL support, please get in touch, and explore our website to find more information about how FiPL works and the projects we've supported so far.



If you are interested in finding out more about our Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme you can visit our website, or get in touch with our Landscape Projects Officer Katie Read on 07977 412249 or email at katie.read@somerset.gov.uk



Celebrating the success of our apprentices

Jem Gibson

Wildlife Officer, Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme

The Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme's first year of apprenticeships are coming to an end. Since last October, our three apprentices Ella, Lewis and Tom have been working on the Level 2 Countryside Worker apprenticeship qualification. Supervised by Matt Beedle from Young Somerset, our apprenticeship team has been invaluable in delivering work across many different QLPS and National Landscape projects.

We are proud to offer our apprentices a broad range of interesting tasks to further their environmental education. Over the summer they conducted many adder and hedgerow surveys, as well as conducting a footprint tunnel project at our Community Woodlands. They also worked to deploy static bat detectors at over 100 locations as part of our Barbastelle Bat Project.



"I have already met a lot of volunteers and colleagues with so much knowledge who are willing to show us apprentices how to get started on gaining licenses such as dormice and bat. For me, to know that what I'm doing is making a difference even if its small, gives me a lot of encouragement to gain my dormice license and hopefully one day be knowledgeable enough to share my experiences to the next generation."

– Ella Bedford

"I've enjoyed most of the work, but the days I enjoy the most are hedge laying, brush cutting and tractor driving. Hedge laying is my favourite activity out of all the work I've done. The job is all about creating a barrier with nothing but a row of trees. I didn't realise how fun and satisfying hedge laying was until I first tried it. Driving a tractor with mounted implements was one of the more recent skills I've learnt. Learning to drive a tractor was tough, knowing how to drive one, knowing which gear stick to use and leaver to pull and driving uphill with an implement, so mastering all of it was very satisfying and I am craving to do more!"

- Lewis Crabtree

Before Christmas, Tom, Lewis and Ella will do their final assessments before moving on to new challenges. We are immensely proud of Tom, who has proven himself as a budding arborist with great chainsaw skills. Tom is leaving us to pursue this avenue and we hope to see him working to protect and enhance our landscape into the future. Lewis will be remaining with Young Somerset to explore further adventures. Lewis has come a long way during our program, gaining several qualifications and growing in confidence. We look forward to working with Lewis more on future projects. Finally Ella, who has also grown incredibly over the last year, will be staying with us and moving on to the Level 4 Ranger Apprenticeship. She will continue to work with QLPS and the Quantock Hills National Landscape Team to gain further skills in countryside management.

QLPS would like to say a huge thank you to all the volunteers, landowners and partners who have helped to facilitate our apprentices' learning through this last year. Many of you have imparted knowledge and shown great kindness to them as they have taken on this challenging program. We are proud of all our apprentices and we look forward to the great things they go on to achieve.



The deer rut on the Quantock Hills

From September onwards you may hear the haunting sound of the red deer stags 'bellowing' as they start to rut across the Quantock Hills and in the woodland and farmland lower down. The bellowing is part of the annual behaviour of the males to assert their dominance over other males and to show off to the females (hinds). Other behaviour that can be witnessed is the collection of mud, leaves and branches on the antlers to make the stag look larger and more imposing; parallel walking, where two males will walk beside each other in a threatening manner to establish dominance often with further bellowing or roaring and occasionally stamping on the ground; and in some instances the fighting between stags where they lock antlers and tussle until one submits. The fighting can result in serious injuries or broken antlers. Once the pecking order has been established the dominant stag will mate with the hinds in his harem, which may be up to 20 in number and the young are born the following June.

Rangers Owen and Andy lead walks in October during the rutting season which allows an excellent opportunity for members of the public to witness the rut first hand. For many people this is the first time they have seen or heard the deer. This autumn we were extremely lucky that the weather conditions and wind direction allowed us to hear lots of bellowing and see various displays by the stags.



Photo © Jochen Langbein

Disabled Ramblers access the Quantock Hills

Over the last 18 months Andy and other members of the Quantock Hills National Landscape Team and QLPS Team have carried out numerous recces with the Somerset Disabled Ramblers group. This has highlighted the parts of the Quantock Hills which are accessible using mobility scooters such as Trampers. The group and its friends have been extremely patient in trialling different routes as well as at times being very brave! Some of the public rights of way are not accessible due to the gradient or the path surface, whilst other paths could be made more accessible. Using funds from the Capital Access Grant supplied by Defra and support from Friends of Quantock, improvements have been made to many of the tracks throughout the Quantock Hills and down the bridleway at Lady's Edge. Further projects have been identified to improve access and will be implemented over the next few years.



The Somerset Disabled Ramblers had their first walking festival on the Quantock Hills in September to showcase the wonderful landscape in this area. For further information on future walks please follow the link below:

disabledramblers.co.uk/calendar

Nature Recovery in the Quantock Hills

Mark Baker, Projects Manager

We are all aware that nature has significantly declined over much of our countryside within the last generation. The beautiful and rugged landscape of the Quantock Hills supports a fantastic range of habitats and wildlife including many rarities. This great diversity has been largely shaped by traditional farming and other land uses. But the Quantock Hills also experienced losses to its nature in past decades and even in the present day there are changes in its wildlife and habitats.



Photo © Liz Elmont

Since the original designation of the Quantock Hills in 1956 the AONB service (now the National Landscape team) have been working closely in partnership with landowners and managers to conserve and enhance nature. A new Nature Recovery plan will build further on that success to halt and reverse any declines in nature.

The first stage of this process was to develop a 'State of Nature' report. This reviewed the range and extent of our most precious habitats known as Priority Habitats. The report outlines the key pressures that have impacted these habitats in the past or the present, including natural vegetation change. The report also highlights where there has been fragmentation of priority habitats which have become isolated and unable to sustain viable populations of the wildlife previously found there.

The Nature Recovery Planning is building on this information and will set out a range of measures to:

- Increase the extent and range of many habitats
- Improve the quality and species-richness of habitats and the special wildlife they support
- Increase the connectivity between habitats to strengthen their resilience
- Help improve the wildlife value of even intensively farmed land
- Approach nature recovery at a landscape scale in partnership with all stakeholders
- Support farmers and other land managers with these plans
- Attract government and other funding to achieve our ambitions
- Engage local communities in this work

When it comes to the habitats - we are aiming for Bigger, Better and More Joined-up. This way the habitats support more wildlife and are more resilient to climate change and provide natural solutions to soil loss, flooding, drought and carbon sequestration. Many Quantock farmers are already carrying out imaginative work to help us with this. We will keep you all posted on progress with this important work.

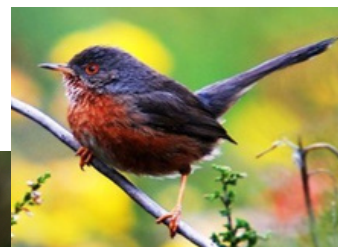


Photo © Alberto Maia

C	P	O	G	W	I	L	D	L	I	F	E
O	O	I	R	E	S	L	Q	P	S	I	G
A	L	N	P	H	D	A	C	W	K	L	A
S	I	E	S	L	L	I	H	J	Y	E	T
T	S	T	S	E	N	A	S	C	P	N	I
F	K	D	T	P	R	E	E	D	I	D	R
A	C	H	A	A	N	V	A	N	O	D	E
R	O	T	T	C	O	B	A	T	S	F	H
N	T	A	I	S	S	G	N	T	U	S	D
Y	N	E	B	D	F	A	R	M	I	N	G
D	A	H	A	N	E	R	V	A	T	O	L
H	U	L	H	A	D	D	E	R	S	H	N
P	Q	I	T	L	O	C	K	S	I	N	G

Coast
Hills
Heath
Bats
Adders

Farming
Landscape
Habitat
Quantocks
Heritage

Deer
Sky
Wildlife
Conservation



Book sales

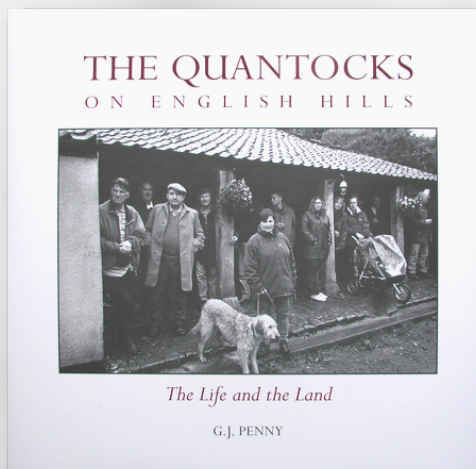


The Seriously NOT Boring Quantock Country Walks Book, is the third in a series of 'Seriously NOT Boring' walk's book that Sue Gearing and Les Davies have written together, aimed particularly at children and their families. Still drawing upon their knowledge of the countryside, its history, landscape and natural beauty, their aim is to show that walking can be anything but boring. Together they have written many other walking books.

There are 12 short circles in and around Quantock Country, between 3.7k (2.5 miles) and 8.4k (5.2 miles) and they include fun things to do such as making a compass in a puddle, sticky stones, building a small shelter and finding the age and height of a tree. So come with us now and join Tom, Mia, Kate, Sam, Harry and the Scamp the inseparable dog on these circles of discovery and adventure.

Mixed blessings is a look at the lives of the agricultural community of the Quantock Hills of West Somerset, through the pictures and extracts from the many hours of interviews the author recorded with farmers and other rural workers from the surrounding area. This book contains a selection of the many hundreds of pictures which Gary has made for the Quantock Hills AONB rural archive.

Gary has been a documentary photographer for over 20 years. During that time his work has sought through his images to define the nature of English people. His work is mainly influenced by the social documentary work of the mass observation movement during the middle and later half of the 20th century, which sets out to record the lives of the ordinary men and women of this country who are so often overlooked.



The Quantocks On English Hills is a unique social document that records in photographs of frankness but matchless beauty, one of the last truly distinctive corners of the country. To many it will still seem a remote place. Yet the pace of change in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has led to huge pressures, not only on the scenery of the Quantocks but on the culture of the people who live and work there and so largely determine its character. Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty status granted in 1957 (making the Quantocks the first AONB in England) has helped significantly to protect and preserve the hills, but the way of life here is still a fragile one.

Acclaimed photographer Gary Penny, who lives in the heart of the Quantock Hills, has spent years recording the people of the area and how they interact with the landscape, latterly as Photographer in Residence with the Quantock Hills AONB.



Quantock Hills National Landscape



www.quantockhills.com



facebook.com/quantock.hills



twitter.com/quantockhills



instagram.com/quantock.hills



quantockhills@somerset.gov.uk



www.youtube.com/quantockhills



Reimagining the Manor



www.qlps.org



facebook.com/quantock.lps



instagram.com/quantocklps



qlps@somerset.gov.uk



www.youtube.com/quantocklandscapepartnershipscheme