



Wassail time at the orchard



On a chilly Sunday afternoon in January we celebrated the first anniversary of tree planting at the community orchard. We began with a practical session, when local cider-maker Keith Orchard provided a master class in tree pruning. Then the real celebration started, with a traditional wassail, led by Jean Sheraton. The assembled company of about 30 did a variation of the Conga round the trees, singing the Brockweir Wassail Song. Cider was poured on the trees, slices of toast were tied to them, and then we all had a drink of mulled cider or mulled apple juice and of course cake. A big thank you to Keith, Jean and the provisions team: Ellie van der Heijden, Judy Craven and Sally Secrett.



What's new in Phil's tool shed?

In the past we have run an occasional column titled *What's new in Phil's tool shed?* This was written by PGP committee member **Phil Morgan**, who last year moved away from the area. The PGP Newsletter is proud to announce the return of the column, now in the capable hands of **Phillip Powles**.

This wire dispenser is known as a Spinning Jenny. It is used for unrolling high-tensile steel wire when you are doing a fencing job. I can't manage without it now. It can be a nightmare trying to unroll the coil of wire if you don't have something like this. Without it the wire can quickly get into a proper mess and then it's very difficult to untangle.

I welded this together using odd bits of old steel. It has a spike on the bottom which you drive into the ground at one end of the fence run. Then you just take the free end of the wire and pull it to the other end of the



fence. You have a nice straight line of wire, ready to be attached to the posts. Without the Spinning Jenny the wire will probably form loops and be difficult or even impossible to pull straight. I made this one ready for the spring, as that's when I normally do that kind of work. It's a really good tool to have in your shed.



N E W S L E T T E R

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The dismal scene in Brockweir last month Photo: Ellie van der Heijden

When the climate finally struck back

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Things to spot this month



Cowslip



Hedgehog

These must be difficult times for any remaining climate-change deniers. The phenomenon has certainly been undeniable locally in recent months, with barely two consecutive dry days since the end of September. Then February brought three ferocious storms, Ciara, Dennis and Jorge. With them came record high river levels and serious flooding in Brockweir, with some residents rescued by boat.

So the Parish Grasslands Projects feels justified in adopting climate change as its current theme. There is more on inside pages about our recent efforts to address the problem. Unfortunately, because of the coronavirus situation we have had to postpone our annual general meeting, due to be held at the Mackenzie Hall on Thursday 26 March. We had arranged for three speakers from the community to bring varied perspectives on climate change. We hope all three speakers will join us as soon as we are able to hold the AGM.

Gemma Bode, Gwent Wildlife Trust's grasslands expert, was to outline some of the "grim realities" and scientific facts about the climate change crisis facing the planet. Agriculture is one of the main contributors to climate change, and **Matt Dunwell** is concerned that current practices are responsible for the loss of organic matter in soils and the spread of deserts -- a critical factor in the rise of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. He believes a change in land management can bring rapid improvement, cooling the planet as we get to grips with lowering carbon dioxide in the long term.

David Rees was to bring his perspective as someone who has spent his working life as an analytical chemist and is shortly to be ordained a priest. He planned to address three strands: the urgent sense of human catastrophe; this catastrophe is wholly the result of human activity; this catastrophe can be averted/ reversed through individual and public policy initiatives.

Cake and climate change

The Parish Grasslands Project decided that 2020 was the year when we should actively start to address the climate emergency. When we were set up nearly 20 years ago our efforts were focused on wild flower meadow conservation. While that is still our central interest, over the years our scope has widened to include all aspects of the environment. It seemed appropriate therefore that as an environmental organisation we should engage with the most fundamental environmental problem of the age.

We've become used to hearing about the ways climate change is dramatically affecting distant continents, with bush fires in Australia and drastic loss of ice in the polar regions. But the effects have increasingly come closer to home, with a pattern of recent wetter winters culminating in an extraordinary autumn/winter period when we have rarely had two consecutive days without rain. Last month's storms, which brought flooding into the heart of our own community, were an emphatic reminder, if anyone still needed one, that climate change is a problem which does not only affect those in distant continents.

This year marks the beginning of a decade during which, sooner or later, we will all have to make changes in how we live, in order to reduce the rate of global warming. By the end of the decade we will have no choice, we will have been forced to adapt many aspects of our daily lives in response to its effects. That is the situation which lead

Our environmental initiative was launched with a bake off - and a visit from a polar bear

to the Parish Grasslands Project's decision to take action. Our goal is to find ways in which our two rural parishes, St Briavels and Hewelsfield & Brockweir, can work together to reduce our combined carbon footprint. After discussing this ambition with others in the community, we formed a working group and decided to break down the problem into five areas of action: energy, food, land use, transport and stuff (consumption/waste). We have set up hubs to address each of these areas.

We launched the scheme with a meeting in the Mackenzie Hall on Saturday February 1. The Cake and Climate Bake Off drew a crowd of about 120, including many young families. It was gratifying to see the hall buzzing with engagement and enthusiasm. The bake off proved hugely popular. A total of 26 magnificent cakes were entered in four categories. Also massively popular, particularly with the children, was the appearance of Bjorn the polar bear. We're very fortunate to have a hot line from Brockweir to the Arctic, which enabled us to arrange his visit.

Hats off to all those who entered cakes in the Bake Off and congratulations to the winners in each category: best looking cake, Alison Macklin; best tasting, Liz, Frank and Karla Garnham; best "free from", Matthew Stone; most outrageous, the Hulme family.

Then there was the more serious business of the afternoon. We adopted and adapted the concept of speed dating to launch our five climate change hubs. Each hub had a table with details of plans for events and action, and audience members were invited to sign up at any hub that interested them. After 10 minutes a bell was rung and everyone was invited to move to another hub. Each hub attracted a great deal of interest and about 75 people signed up as supporters, in many cases with more than one hub.

The various hubs will act relatively independently and



Signing up for the Food hub



The community's cake-makers displayed their talents, with a total of 26 entries in the Bake



The visit from Bjorn the polar bear was a huge attraction

Photos: John F French

hold meetings to plan their activities and events. Transport, Energy, Stuff and Food all held meetings in February and early March. Here is a list of further plans. Please come along to any of these meetings or events that take your fancy. They are open to anyone from the local community.

Stuff hub: Brainstorming session Monday 16 March, 7pm at the Village Shop Loft. Bring your ideas on how we can tackle problems relating to consumption and waste

Land use hub: Brockweir wildlife walk Sunday 5 April 2pm-4pm starting at the Loft. Wild flower identification, bird boxes, community wildlife project. Please book your place at wcvillages@gmail.com

Transport hub: Electric bike demonstrations Saturday 25 April, 11am till 1.00pm, Mackenzie Hall. Come along to test ride an electric bike. Plus fun bikes, a bendy bike and even a penny-farthing.

Energy hub: Open house weekends, April 25-26 and May 16-17. Householders with various forms of renewable energy technology, including retro-fitted insulation, will demonstrate these to visitors. Anyone with a suitable



energy set-up who is willing to be an open day host, or who can suggest possible hosts, is asked to email mike.topp@yahoo.co.uk with details.

Midsummer Festival Saturday 20 June. Plans are at an early stage, more details later. In the meantime, save the date!



Off, including a polar bear self-portrait

Photos: Matt Dunwell