

Quantock Hills

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



Summer Newsletter – Issue 17

August 2022



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Changing Times

Iain Porter
Quantock Hills AONB Manager

It is a time of change for protected landscapes, both nationally and more locally.

For the Quantock Hills we have had quite a bit of change within our team, with Chris Edwards, who was with the AONB for nearly 33 years, retiring in March and myself being appointed as the AONB Manager.

After a bit of a gap it is great to have our Community Engagement Ranger post filled by Abby Wilkinson and Mark Baker coming on board as our Project Manager looking after our Landscapes Projects.

Following the Landscape Review in 2018, which looked at the role of AONBs and National Parks now and into the future, Government has started setting out what our priorities will be, and the changes required to realise them. Nature Recovery, Climate Change and delivering for people will all be high on the priority list.

The Quantock Hills AONB Partnership has been delivering on these priorities for a good number of years as can be seen by the articles in this newsletter and hope that proposals unveiled by Government later this year will allow the step change in delivery that we so want to realise.

It is an interesting time to be leading a protected landscape team and I am excited by the opportunities that will allow our team and partners to deliver more for nature and people in England's first Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Quantock Hills Grant Schemes Update

Katie Read

Quantock Hills AONB Landscape Projects Officer

Our landscape projects team have been working hard with applicants to develop interesting and innovative projects for consideration by the Landscape Projects Panel. The panel assesses applications to two grant schemes; Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) and the Greater Quantocks Landscape Development Fund (LDF) and is made up of local representatives from different sectors with specialities in land management, biodiversity, landscape character and communities to name just a few. It is this wide range of expertise that ensures approved projects are providing value for money, as well as delivering on important environmental and cultural outcomes.

We have had a great response to FiPL locally, and have now approved 18 projects, with 6 more up for consideration over the summer. FiPL and LDF complement each other perfectly, as LDF supports those who may not be farmers or landowners but are just as motivated to enhance natural beauty and landscape character. This programme is funded by EDF and supports community-based projects that mitigate the impact of the Hinkley Point C development. This means the eligible area is different to the Quantock Hills AONB boundary (see below for a list of eligible parishes, or visit our website to view a map).



The LDF scheme launched in 2014, and we have since supported 50 projects. Although we only have 10% of our original budget left to allocate, we are still keen to develop new projects with community groups looking to deliver tree, orchard and hedge planting, restoration of ponds and wildflower meadows and small-scale woodland management. You could receive a grant of up to £5,000 towards your project, or 75% of your costs.

We have previously supported the restoration of Hector's pool by National Trust and AONB volunteers. This historic pond was severely silted, and the bank had eroded on one side, so that there was very little standing water.

The volunteers removed silt and cleared some of the surrounding trees to allow water to flow freely into the pool and to reduce the excessive shading. Hector's pool is thought to have been one of three medieval stock ponds on the Quantock Hills and sits alongside a popular bridleway and walking route.

Other projects have included the creation of a new multi-purpose pond at Kilve Court, supporting woodland restoration work by the Stowey Green Spaces Group, and the restoration of the characteristic network of blue lias stone walls running through the village of Stockland Bristol. In total, LDF projects have planted 2.7km of hedge, and managed a further 3.9km. 254 orchard trees have been planted and nearly 12ha of woodland brought into management, in addition to planting nearly 2,000 woodland trees. Over 6 projects, 4,214m² of ponds have been created or restored.

If you are involved in a community group in the parishes of Broomfield, Cannington, Chilton Trinity, East Quantoxhead, Enmore, Fiddington, Goathurst, Holford, Kilve, Nether Stowey, Otterhampton, Over Stowey, Spaxton, Stogursey, Stockland Bristol, Stringston, Watchet, Wembdon, West Quantoxhead or, Williton we may be able to help. Please get in touch with our Landscape Projects Officer, Katie Read, on 07977 412249 or czread@somerset.gov.uk to discuss your project.

Learning Disabilities Week 2022

Jon Barrett

Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme, Community Engagement & Volunteering Officer

This year's Learning Disability Week was all about reconnecting with friends and communities, and what a wonderful way to celebrate this with an event hosted at Hestercombe Gardens by Somerset Nature Connections, which is a partnership project between the Quantock Hills, Blackdown Hills and Mendip Hills AONB's and the Somerset Wildlife Trust. There were around one hundred people turning up, many of whom were seeing each other again for the first time in years following Covid restrictions.

Kristen Lambert, from Somerset Nature Connections organised this fantastic event in glorious summer sunshine bringing together all these neighbouring learning disability groups and bringing smiles to the faces of so many individuals across the day. Hestercombe is also home to Reflect, a disability support service for members of the community based around the Quantock Hills.

Participants had the chance to experience everything from singing lessons, nature craft, loom weaving, and Quantock Hills AONB Community Engagement Ranger, Abby Wilkinson, alongside Jon Barrett, QLPS Community Engagement & Volunteering Officer, offered visitors a chance to create their own 'landscapes' by making paint with raw minerals from the Quantock Hills. The participants made some very inspiring artwork that they could proudly take away and hold onto their own piece of the hills.



Following this event, the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme hosted a Wild Workout beach clean later in the week, alongside Pluss Positive People, who were able to bring a cohort of 13 people with learning disabilities to help support the clean-up of the coastline. Joined by Quantock Hills AONB Ranger, Andy, and several volunteers, we covered some 4km in the day and collected a few small bags worth of plastics and other items.

As well as helping to conserve the coastline, this was a day to overcome barriers and build confidence for those attending. As we know, the West Somerset coastline can be an unforgiving place, and the ground was as challenging as it comes for the group. It was inspiring to see this group overcome the unfamiliar and uneven terrain and make the most of this natural environment during Learning Disability Week 2022.

Our Wild Workout groups take place across a variety of locations and look to support mental and physical wellbeing by doing good for countryside or community through exercise and voluntary activities.



If you would like to join us, to support yourself or others, please get in touch with Jon Barrett, QLPS Community Engagement and Volunteering Officer to register an interest: jlbarrett@somerset.gov.uk

Quantock Hills AONB Staff Changes



Abby Wilkinson
Quantock Hills & Blackdown Hills AONB's
Community Engagement Ranger

Abby Wilkinson has joined the Quantock Hills team as our Community Engagement Ranger. The role is shared within the Quantock Hills and the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty to increase and manage the volunteering opportunities within the two AONB's.

"Hello My name is Abby Wilkinson and I am the new Community Engagement Ranger for the Quantock Hills and Blackdown Hills AONB's.

I have previously worked with a wide range of communities, enabling them to participate and contribute in some way to their local environment. More recently I worked in a primary school on the edge of the Blackdown Hills.

I'm looking forward to meeting you all and creating new opportunities for you to get involved in protecting, enhancing and most importantly enjoying all that each AONB have to offer"

Abby can be contacted via email at AWilkinson@somerset.gov.uk



Mark Baker
Quantock Hills AONB, Projects Manager

We would like to welcome Mark Baker to the team as our new Projects Manager. This is an exciting new role focusing on further developing and implementing the Nature Recovery Strategy for the Quantock Hills AONB.

"I have recently been appointed by the AONB as Projects Manager. This is an exciting new role focusing on further developing and implementing the Nature Recovery Strategy for the Quantock Hills AONB area.

This will involve working with the AONB team and with partners such farmers and landowners, statutory bodies, wildlife conservation organisations and local communities. I will also be working closely with the AONB's landscape project team which provides different types of funding for landowners for a variety of projects to benefit the Quantock Hills for everyone.

In future updates we'll provide more detail on our plans for nature recovery and some of the newer sources of funding available for farmers and landowners to help conserve and improve our landscape and wildlife on the Quantocks.

I was born and bred on a Dartmoor farm but have worked in for many years in wildlife conservation, countryside management training and as an ecologist. I've lived in this area for over 25 years and am passionate about wildlife but also enjoy walking and trail running on the Quantock Hills. Over the years I've seen how much the AONB team has achieved for the benefit of the landscape, wildlife and local communities and I look forward to contributing to this great work"

Mark can be contacted via email at mark.baker@somerset.gov.uk

What's On!

Wednesday 3rd August – Wednesday 31st August – Wild Wednesdays at Stockmoor

Join the LPS at Stockmoor Country Park as we run a series of Wild Wednesdays– nature activities every Wednesday throughout August.

Email qlps@somerset.gov.uk for more information.

Friday 17th August – Stockmoor Country Park, 2pm – 5pm

As part of our Wild Wednesdays in Hamp and Stockmoor during the summer holidays we're inviting you on a family-friendly Photo Walk around Stockmoor Country Park, Hamp and surrounding areas.

Email qlps@somerset.gov.uk for more information.

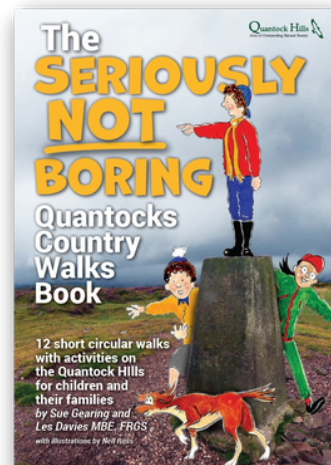
Thursday 18th August – The Seriously Not Boring Book Walk, 10am

Join accomplished authors Sue Gearing and Les Davies with AONB Manager Iain on a family walk at East Quantoxhead at the launch of the 'Seriously Not Boring Quantock Country' walk book.

This wonderful book, the 3rd in the series, contains 12 walks for families to enjoy and the authors have picked one of their favourites as the launch walk. We will explore the historic village of East Quantoxhead, go back in time on the beach looking for fossils and hopefully do a bit of rock pooling.

To book visit:

<https://www.quantockhills.com/event-details/seriously-not-boring-book-walk>



Friday 26th August – Drawing in the landscape, 10am – 4pm

Another event as part of our Stories of the Hills project. Join artist Alison Jacobs for a day of outdoor art. You'll be walking and sketching outdoors and using the Quantocks as your inspiration.

Email office@halswaymanor.org.uk to book.

Sunday 28th August – Halsway Manor Fete, 12pm – 4pm

This year the Halsway Manor Fete returns! With stalls including local foods, arts and crafts. Storytelling for children, maypole and traditional country dancing for everyone to join in, and a lovely range of delicious things to eat.

For more information visit: <https://qlps.org/halsway-manor-fete>

Friday 5th September – Cecil Sharp Song walk, 2pm

Another Stories of the hills project event. This time folk singer Bill Crawford will lead you on a Quantock Ramble and share with you some of the traditional songs collected around the Quantocks in the early 20th Century by prolific collector Cecil Sharp.

Email office@halswaymanor.org.uk to book.

Tuesday 20th September – Heritage Railway Photo Walk

Join us for a journey on the West Somerset Railway as we travel the length of the Quantock Hills by steam train from Bishops Lydeard station and return on foot to a countryside station along the journey, where we will be transported back. Timing TBC (Expected to be 10:15am train, returning 4:15pm).

Email qlps@somerset.gov.uk for more information.

iNaturalist – Quantocks Wildlife Watch

Zoe Hicks

Friends of Quantock, Project Officer

Members of the public are being asked to take part in the biggest wildlife survey ever seen in the Quantocks. Friends of Quantock, in conjunction with the Quantock Hills AONB and the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme are asking the c4,000 people using the Quantocks every day to get involved in the 'Quantocks Wildlife Watch'; a long term citizen science project which will help prioritise the future management and wildlife conservation for the Quantocks.



The project will use the iNaturalist application developed by National Geographic and the California Academy of Sciences to capture the varied and diverse range of wildlife found on the Quantocks.

People are asked to register on iNaturalist and simply photograph any living species they see; plants, animals, insects, fungi, lichen etc. on or around the Quantocks and use the iNaturalist application to identify and record it.

The application geolocates the photograph and helps identify what it is, whilst also making the record available to all users.

The mapping of all sightings allows individuals to explore where others have recorded things e.g. the best spots for certain butterflies or plants etc. Recorded sightings, which iNaturalist calls 'observations', will provide important information to the organisations and land owners involved in the management and conservation of the Quantocks and will also contribute to important national wildlife monitoring programmes.

Friends of Quantock is the only conservation charity for the Quantocks and owns some of the land within the Quantock Hills AONB. The charity wants to use the Quantocks Wildlife Watch to help prioritise future conservation efforts whilst helping people understand quite how special the Quantocks are.

It is anticipated not only will the project benefit the wildlife of the Quantocks, but also benefit the individuals taking part, helping people develop their knowledge of the wildlife around them not to mention the mental health benefits of getting immersed in nature.

We have already used the data captured when made aware of an invasive species in one of the Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Left unattended it would have caused significant damage to the fragile habitat and through iNaturalist the project team were able to locate and remove all of the invasive plants and protect the area from further harm.

We are asking all visitors to add a few observations each time you are out, especially if you notice something new. Give your walks a focus, one day plants, another day insects etc; it is incredible how many insects you can see when you really look for them. Make your walks more interesting and know you are providing valuable information too.

Together through greater understanding, everyone can play a part in the future conservation of our Quantock wildlife.

If you would like to find out more about the project, or how to get involved visit:
www.friendsofquantock.com or email **info@friendsofquantock.com**

Preserving the Historic Heritage of the Quantocks

Dan Broadbent

Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme, Historic Heritage Officer

Would you like to help preserve knowledge of Historic Buildings in and around the Quantock Hills?

The Quantocks are home to many historically significant structures and buildings, including not only residential dwellings, but also farm buildings, and old industrial structures such as lime kilns. Often, these important historical structures are in places without public access, and some are at risk of loss through abandonment or development.

The QLPS is now recruiting volunteers to form a small team of dedicated Historic Building Recorders who will help create detailed written, photographic, and drawn records of historic buildings and structures across the LPS area.

No experience is necessary as full training will be provided. If you are interested in acquiring new, specialist skills, and making a valuable and lasting contribution to the historic heritage of the area, please do get in touch.

We are also keen to hear from anyone who owns a historic building or structure that they would be interested in having recorded as part of the project.

To learn more about the project and express your interest in taking part, please contact our Historic Heritage Officer, Dan Broadbent via email at dbroadbent@somerset.gov.uk



Quantock Hills Walking Festival – Beat The Boundary

The annual Quantock Walking Festival hosted by the Stowey Walking group took place across a five-day period in June, following the Jubilee bank holiday weekend. There were a number of very interesting guided walks taking place over the main weekend of the festival (11th/12th June), with a multi-day challenge walk spanning most of the festival dates.



Beat the Boundary was a four-day event starting at Nether Stowey and followed local footpaths to circumnavigate the Quantock Hills AONB and take in a boundary at the foothills of our beloved hills and heathland. Roughly equating to a ring of parishes around the hills itself, the boundary walk followed the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme's project boundary, all 55 miles of it! Each leg of the journey was between 20km – 28km of walking, and went in a clockwise direction taking in the different landscape characteristics from underfoot to afar the hills were visible from all different perspectives around the route.

We hope that this event will prove to be popular again and have further iterations during the legacy of the Quantock Walking Festival. The long way around the hills is a remarkable achievement for everyone involved and we hope it will help to increase the scale of this magnificent festival, not just in terms of miles covered.



The medals given to those who completed the walk were made by our Young Rangers, crafted from sections of Quantock oak, and were hand stamped with charcoal ink made from local hazel.

CREATE A POETRY TRAIL ACROSS THE QUANTOCK HILLS OF SOMERSET!

You are invited to join Bristol-based poet, writer and located audio designer Ralph Hoyte to co-create the Quantock Poetry Trail. I am looking for poets and people interested in writing poetry who have an active connection with the Quantocks*

THE BIG IDEA! Together we will wander the Quantocks, or adjacent locations, composing '*en plein air*' poetry as did the Romantic poets Dorothy and William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge in the 18th century.

Then we will work up our material through a series of workshops over the year September 2022-September 2023.

**poets and people writing poetry who live in the Quantocks and adjoining areas; poets and people writing poetry from further afield who have a strong Quantocks and/or Romantic poet connection*



Website: ralphhoyte.org

HOW DO I GET INVOLVED?

If you are interested in working with me and other poets on the Quantock Poetry Trail, please register an interest by emailing: qlps@somerset.gov.uk with the email heading 'Quantock Poetry Trail'. You will be updated as we firm up the schedule (etc), with the first introductory meet-up timetabled for September 2023 (tbd)


Quantock Landscape
Partnership Scheme

Reimagining the Manor



Heritage
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Quantock Hills
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

What happens to our work?

- Our work will be published online in writing and as audio recordings; selected poems will be published 'in paper form' (*possibly Georgian-era style 'broadsheet poems'*); more publishing possibilities will emerge as the project progresses; performances will be part of the mix
- Selected work – and this is the really exciting bit – will form part of a digitally geo-located Quantock Poetry Trail across the Quantock Hills (and outliers). Anyone with a smartphone – poets, visitors, ramblers, geo-cachers – will be able to physically follow in the footsteps of the Romantic poets to find and listen to our selected poems **IN THE ACTUAL LOCATIONS** which inspired them!
- Through the same magical technologies, listeners will be joined on the Quantock Poetry Trail by the actual Romantic poets. Anyone with a smartphone will be able to eavesdrop on them as young people – they were only in their 20s – as they compose, squabble, get drunk, philosophize – and discuss their revolutionary new concept for poetry: '*Romantic poetry: the poetry of the sublime, in the language of the common person*'!





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