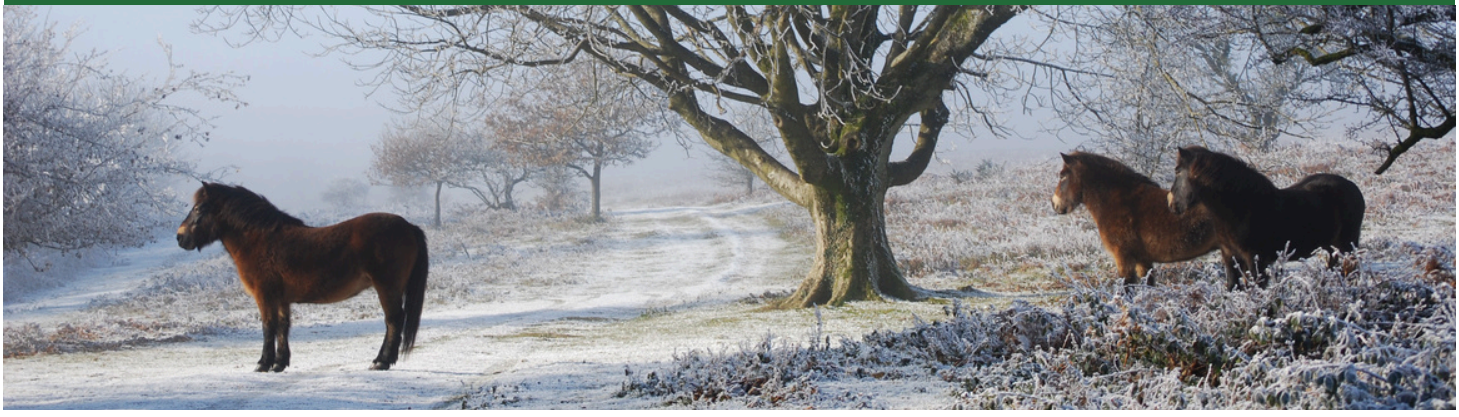
Quantock Hills National Landscape

Issue 25- November 2026



IN THIS ISSUE:

Our heritage

British Empire Medal

Painting the hills

Changes at Cothelstone

Bumper year for bats

FiPL

Planning policy

Events and community engagement

Book sales

Meet the team

Talking about our heritage

Iain Porter, Quantock Hills National Landscape Manager

The Team was delighted to host the first ever Quantock Hills Heritage Symposium in October. The event aimed to celebrate the wonderful heritage of the Quantock Hills and included talks on the recent discovery of late Bronze-Age features in the south of the National Landscape, the collection of local folk songs by Cecil Sharp, local archives and collections and a keynote presentation by Bob Croft on his 40-year career in Heritage in Somerset.

Over sixty people attended the event, generating lots of questions and discussion for the speakers. Feedback from the event has been hugely positive with many calling for a similar event next year. With such a wealth of heritage within the Quantock Hills there will be no lack of subject matter or speakers so the team will be getting their heads together to plan the next wonderful event.



British Empire Medal Award

Caroline Tilley, Communications & Support Officer (Volunteers)


Dave Scott at the Gamefair 2011

We would like to congratulate one of our long standing volunteers Dave Scott on his British Empire Medal, awarded to him for his contribution to countryside conservation and heritage.

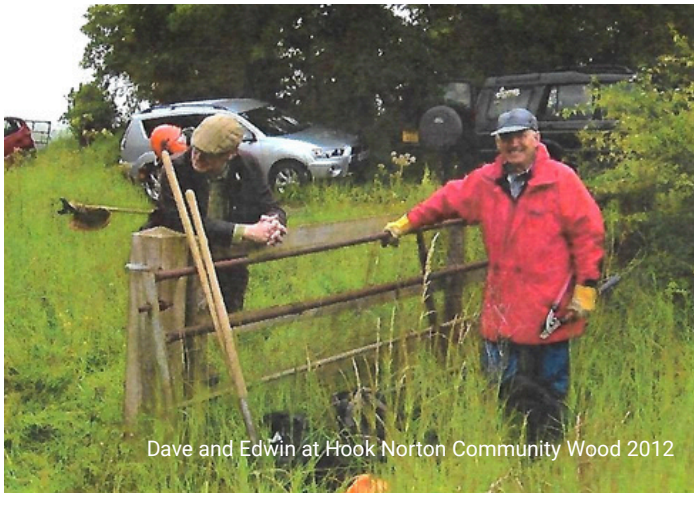
Three Somerset 'Community Champions' were awarded British Empire Medals at a ceremony held in Taunton.
The Lord-Lieutenant of Somerset, Mohammed Saddiq, presented the medals and said "You have all selflessly volunteered your time to your local communities, going far beyond the extra mile and you are fully deserving of these medals. Congratulations to you all." The British Empire Medal (BEM) is awarded on behalf of the Monarch for "hands on" service to the local community over a period of time.

Dave has volunteered since 1976 when he began to work as a Cotswold Warden. Following his retirement from teaching in 2017, he moved to Somerset where he became a Volunteer Ranger with the Quantock Hills National Landscape. He also works for the Minehead Woodland Group and volunteers on the West Somerset Railway.

The award was principally awarded for Dave's 40 years' service as a Cotswold AONB Volunteer Warden and specifically his role as a Work Park Co-ordinator/Project Officer, organising and leading a variety of practical conservation, access and heritage tasks in various parts of the National Landscape.
This involved identifying suitable projects or developing existing ones and carrying out initial surveys. In some cases it also involved obtaining funding and then drawing up a programme of works, compiling risk assessments, briefing leaders for work parties or actually leading the work party on the day.

During Dave's 25 year tenure an impressive amount of work was carried out, a few examples are, 9,448 trees were planted, 2,225 meters of hedge rows were planted, 31,508 meters of pathway were cleared and 12,954 metres of fencing maintained. Only about 10% of the work was organised and led by full time staff.

A further 5% would have full time support with specialised machinery, delivery of materials, etc. Two volunteer work parties took place a week, with an average attendance of 4/5 increasing to double figures if a large bonfire was on the programme!


Dave and Edwin at Hook Norton Community Wood 2012

Painting the hills

The National Landscape Team partnered with the South West Society of Botanical Artists (SWSBA) in hosting a two week exhibit at Fyne Court in July with over 80 paintings and illustrations of the special plants, fungi and lichens of the Quantock Hills. The exhibit is the culmination of a two-year project that aimed to paint and depict plants associated with the special habitats of the Quantock Hills.

The project came about when we were approached by Mary Taylor, an artist with SWSBA, who was looking for a new project. It was perfect timing for the Team as it linked wonderfully with our developing a new Nature Recovery Plan, the Management Plan review and a realisation that there was a lack of work on the individual plant species that make the Quantock Hills special.



Various hollies, Jean Chisholm

The exhibit was a huge success with lots of visitors and positive comments inspiring the group to develop a new phase with a further year's painting planned aiming to capture plants associated with acidic mires, a very rare habitat on the Quantock Hills, and some species that are likely to be adversely affected by the changing climate.



The first Quantock Botanical Arts Exhibition held in July at Fyne Court



Sycamore twig Spring, Jon Evans

Changes at Cothelstone Hill

Andy Stevenson, Ranger

Over the last few months at Cothelstone Hill there have been some changes. At the start of September contractors thinned out a block of sycamore trees on the south side of the site to allow other tree species to flourish and more light to reach the woodland floor. Sycamore casts a lot of shade in a woodland and dominates other trees.



Now that they have been cut and removed, volunteers will be going in to replant the area with a mixture of native broadleaved trees including oak, hazel and rowan. The area already known for good displays of bluebells should also benefit from increased light levels.



In other areas of the woodland, the rangers and volunteers have recently installed three deer exclosure plots to keep deer, people and dogs from straying where there are populations of dormice. These will be monitored over the next 10 years to see if it has had an impact on the dormice numbers.

On the open grassland we welcomed six Dexter cows for the month of September to see if they coped with the site and the number of visitors. Initially they stayed in one part near to the water trough but became braver and more inquisitive as the days went on. We anticipated that they would explore areas that the Exmoor ponies were less keen on and would trample down some of the bracken at the same time. The owner was pleased with their condition at the end of the month and so we hope to have them back for longer next year.

Sadly, we have also had to say goodbye to the last of the original Exmoor pony mares.

Warren Jezabel was the last of the original herd that came to live on the hill back in the 1990s. She was born in 1994 and moved onto Cothelstone Hill around 1996.

There are currently now 9 Exmoor ponies living on Cothelstone Hill.



A bumper year for bats!

Iain Porter, Quantock Hills National Landscape Manager

The Team's valiant volunteers completed the Quantock Hills Bat Monitoring Programme this summer and autumn, which covered seven sites surveying for both species diversity and abundance of bats. The programme has been running since 2013 with new sites added over the years. The results are fed into the Natural England / Bat Conservation Trusts National Monitoring Programme as well as informing landowners' site plans.

The exceptional dry and hot weather over the summer and autumn appears to have benefited bats with the number of calls recorded being higher than any previous years. The species diversity remained high with at least eleven of the eighteen species found in the UK recorded and it is expected more will be identified when the calls are analysed over the winter.



Daubenton's, I Porter



Bat in Goathurst, K Coate



Bat training

We'd like to take the opportunity to say a huge thank you to our dedicated team of volunteers who undertook over 123 hours of surveying over the summer!

If you want to know more about the bats found on the Quantock Hills have a look at the Bat monitoring report 2025 on our website at:
www.quantockhills.com/surveyreports/quantock-hills-bat-monitoring

Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL)

Jules Jameson, Farming Engagement Support Officer

The Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme was originally part of Defra's Agricultural Transition Plan, but has been extended to March 2029.

The programme will fund projects that:

- support nature recovery.
- mitigate the impacts of climate change.
- provide opportunities for people to discover, enjoy and understand the landscape and its cultural heritage.
- protect or improve the quality and character of the landscape or place.



Sunset over Paradise Farm orchard creation

FiPL in the Quantock Hills

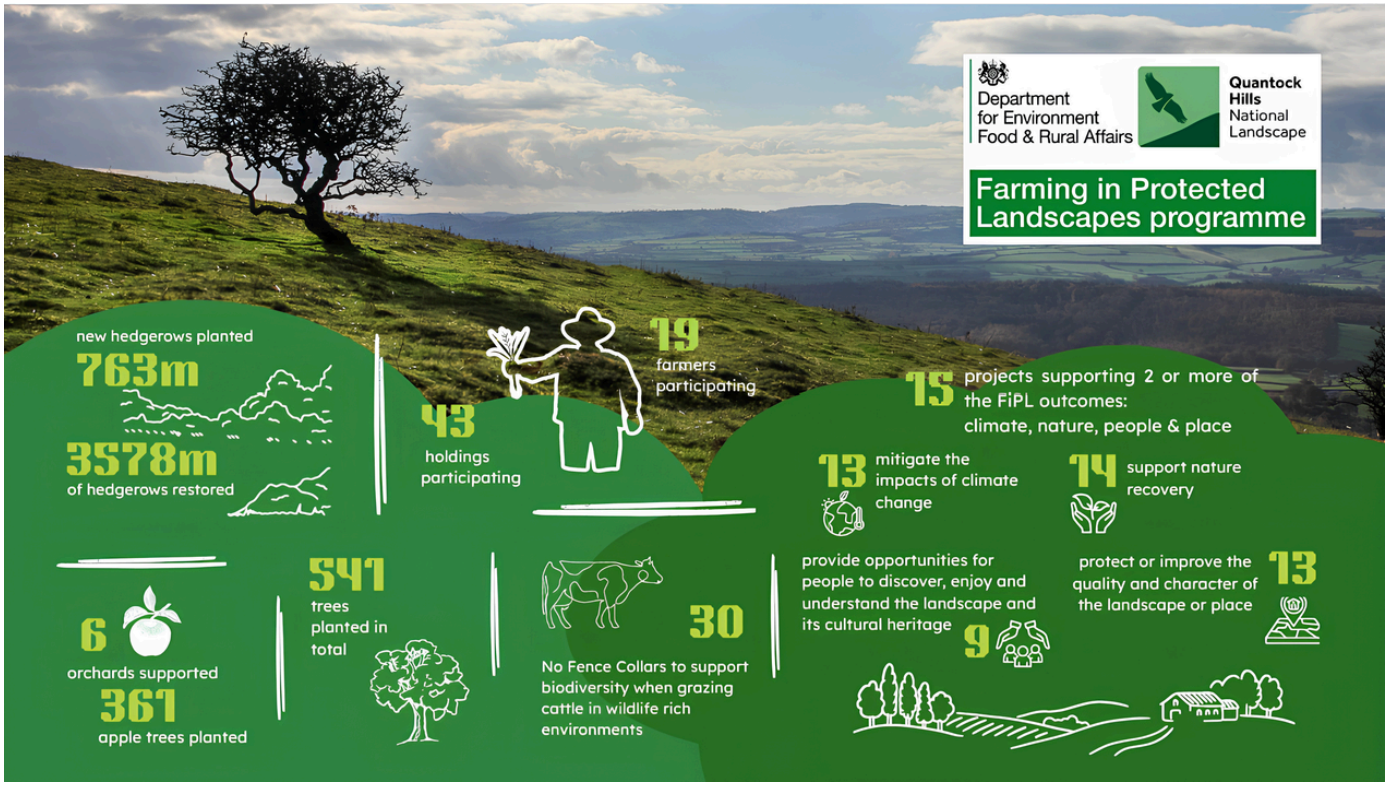
The 2026/27 budget allocation has now been fully committed across 13 excellent projects supporting landowners and farmers to care for the protected landscape whilst carrying out their business activities. Readers will be aware that this year has been the third successive year that farmers have faced significant challenges from climate change, naturally the local wildlife is also suffering too. In the main, this year's FiPL cohort has concentrated their efforts on creating and restoring 3578m of hedgerow which not only supports their business infrastructure but also provides protective corridors, forage, and nesting sites for local wildlife, as well as planting 763m of brand new hedgerows for future generations to enjoy, encouraging currently declining numbers of animals to thrive.

Other examples of this year's projects are desilting of a large overgrown pond ensuring water capture and habitat restoration for wildlife, new orchard creation as well as projects restoring and managing existing ones and trials of No Fence Collars for grazing cattle to promote and manage sensitive wildlife habitats on the Quantock Hills. Other examples of successful FiPL projects can be found on our website's Funding page www.quantockhills.com/funding.

Do you have a project in mind in need of funding?

The Farming in Protected Landscapes programme has been developed by Defra with the support of National Landscape and National Park staff from across England. This is a competitive programme which will run until March 2029; the budget for 2026/27 has been committed and now the team is actively looking for new projects taking us through 2027/28 and beyond; multi-year projects are actively encouraged. Farming in Protected Landscapes programme is open to all farmers and land managers within a National Landscape or National Park in England. This includes farmers and land managers from the public, private and charity sector. To be eligible, the project must benefit the protected landscape or the protected landscape body's objectives, or partnership initiatives.

We would love to hear from anyone looking to develop a project with us; get in touch with the FiPL team at FiPLQuantockHills@somerset.gov.uk giving a brief description of the project and any supporting documentation you may already have.



Farmer Cluster activities

This year has seen the revival of the Quantock Hills Farmer Cluster; still in its infancy the cluster is a way for farmers and affiliated service providers in the area to network, share learning and training opportunities and generally support one another. Farming can be a solitary affair, and small family businesses don't get the same opportunities for training, professional development ideas sharing as those on other industries; there are not many "water cooler moments" in a tractor cab! The FiPL budget allows for a little funding to support such activities, back in the summer we hosted a Pie and a Pint evening to get local farmers round the table to find out what kind of support they might be interested in. This has let our team to apply for other funding avenues to support their needs.

As if the tremendous heat and lack of rain were not enough to contend with, livestock farmers were also hit with a Bluetongue outbreak affecting cows and sheep across the Quantock Hills. The Farmer Cluster held a Bluetongue awareness evening with a local Veterinary practice to give advice and guidance on spotting the signs and managing the outcomes of vaccinations; we were also joined by two Defra representatives to advise farmers on the severity of the outbreak and the reporting requirements should they suffer an outbreak on their property.

We hope to be able to run similar learning events in the future as well as plans for follow up support in the event of an outbreak. As a new farmer Cluster group we are learning as we go and welcome comments and ideas for all our members. If you'd like to sign up to our Farmer Cluster newsletter please contact FiPLQuantockHills@somerset.gov.uk and follow us on Instagram at www.instagram.com/quantockhillsfarmercluster.

National Planning Policy Framework

Alex Meletiou, Quantock Hills National Landscape Planning Officer

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is a comprehensive document that outlines the government's planning policies for England. It serves as a guide for local planning authorities and developers on what is permitted and prohibited in planning matters. The NPPF is not a law but a set of guidelines that influence planning decisions. It covers a wide range of topics, including housing, business and economic growth, Green Belt, transport, landscape, design, climate change, flooding, biodiversity, heritage significance, and more. The NPPF aims to promote sustainable development and empower local communities in shaping their environments. Over the last few years aspects of the NPPF have been revised, with the latest edition coming into force on 17th August 2026.

The main points of interest from the National Landscape perspective are:

- The recognition of the importance of National Landscape management plans in directing environmental opportunities and safeguards for inclusion in development plans, and in steering the location of development - NPPF policy N1 (1).
- Clarity that development proposals within protected landscapes should be limited in scale and extent, and that development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed - NPPF policy N4 (1).
- Clarity that proposals for major development within protected landscapes should be refused other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest - NPPF policy N4 (2).
- Clarity that the housing requirement in protected landscapes within a local plan need not be as high as the objectively assessed need, where there is a strong reason for restricting the overall scale of development - NPPF policy S1 (1) (a) (i).
- The explicit identification of protected landscapes as exceptions where the presumption in favour of development within settlements would not apply - NPPF policy S4 (2) (a) (ii).

There are also some key areas of concern:

- The change in the wording to the weight afforded to protected landscapes from ‘great’ to ‘substantial’, may well cause confusion and greater delays to planning decisions. It is welcome however that in the Government’s published response to the NPPF consultation, clarification was given that even with the wording changes, protected landscapes will retain the same high level of statutory protection.
- Conversely the failure to explicitly identify protected landscapes in the examples of where the presumption in favour of development in certain circumstances outside settlements should not apply, which again may well cause confusion and greater delays to planning decisions.



Events and community engagement

The Quantock Hills National Landscape Team have delivered walks and events for over 30 years, however with the emergence of the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme the level of engagement increased one hundredfold. The work of the QLPS in respect of engagement was nationally recognised not only for the increased diversity of inclusive events but also the diversity of the communities the scheme worked with.

The National Landscape Team recognised the importance of this work stream and brought the QLPS Community Engagement and Volunteer Officer into the core team when the QLPS ended in November. This has allowed the learning from the QLPS to start being embedded into the Team's core events and engagement. One of the early successes has been the Month of Mud, a month long series of events held in February 2026, traditionally a quiet month for events.

Month of Mud - 25 new events, 919 people attended, 6 Walk-Leader led events, 11 partnership events (National Trust, RSPCA and Blabbermouth Storytelling), 9.2k social media site visits during period, 348 new follows on social media during period. 5 media appearances (Guardian newspaper online, BBC Radio 4 PM Programme, BBC Radio 2 Jeremy Vine, BBC Somerset two radio appearances, ITV West scheduled but not fulfilled – plus local press, Somerset Gazette/West Somerset Free Press).



Historically, February was known as Solmonath in Old English, which often gets translated as 'Mud Month'. Appropriately then, it was the time of year to make the most of mud. This festival of events during February featured everything from storytelling, hikes, photo walks, welly walks, family-friendly activities, creative craft, workshops, and mud bingo nature activity packs.

The programme of events was then followed by Hide & Seek in March, celebrating the windy month and the coming spring, and finally our April Open, where all events were free.

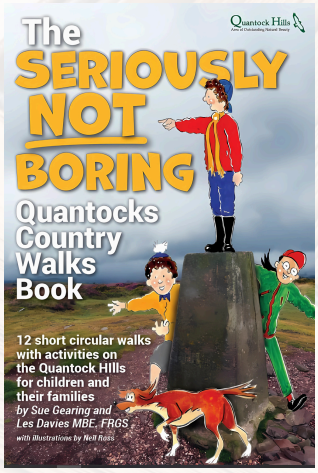




To find out more about our events taking place next year, keep an eye on our website events page at https://www.quantockhills.com/qhevents

Book sales

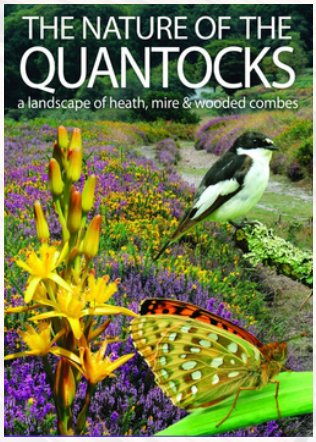
Here are a selection of the books we have available to buy on our website shop, have a look at the shop by visiting: https://www.quantockhills.com/shop



The Seriously NOT Boring Quantock Country Walks Book, is the third in a series of 'Seriously NOT Boring' walks 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.

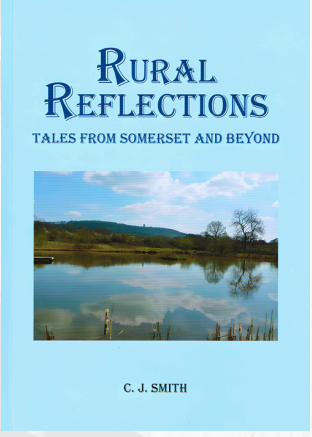
For more information about the book visit:
https://www.quantockhills.com/product-page/seriously-not-boring-quantocks-country-walks-book



Friends of the Quantocks are thrilled to announce the publication of a brand new book 'The Nature of the Quantocks' written by local expert Nigel Phillips, who has pulled together a complete guide to the Quantock Hills.

An intimate mixture of hilltop heathland, oak woodland set in deep combes, and many fast-flowing streams, combine to create the Quantock Hills National Landscape. This detailed and informative book covers the well-known flowering plants and ferns, birdlife and mammals of these magnificent hills. It also explores lesser-known wildlife, with chapters on mosses and liverworts, fungi and lichens, and invertebrates.

For more information about the book visit the Friends of the Quantocks website:
https://friendsofthequantocks.org/the-nature-of-the-quantocks-book/



Rural Reflections - Tales from Somerset and beyond. After two decades in agricultural and environmental education, Dr Chris Smith switched to working with the former Nature Conservancy Council and the Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group before setting up his own consultancy practice, ultimately moving from his native Bucks to Somerset's Quantock Hills.

The anecdotes in Rural Reflections relate to escapades in his newly adopted county over the opening years of the new millennium, covering seasonal observations of the natural world from farming and wildlife to weather and celestial happenings, as well as reflections on earlier experiences and wider issues.

For more information about the book visit:
https://www.quantockhills.com/product-page/rural-reflections-tales-from-somerset-and-beyond

Meet the team...

There have been a few changes to the team since the start of the year, so here is a little who's who in the team:



Iain Porter
Quantock Hills National Landscape Manager



Alex Meletiou
Landscape Planning Officer



Amanda Sampson
Communications & Support Officer



Andy Stevenson
Quantock Hills Ranger



Owen Jones
Quantock Hills & Forestry Partnership Ranger



Caroline Tilley
Communications & Support Officer (Volunteers)



Jon Barrett
QLPS Community Engagement & Volunteering Officer



Stewart Ford
Landscape Project Officer (FiPL)



Jules Jameson
Farming Engagement Support Officer (FiPL)



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