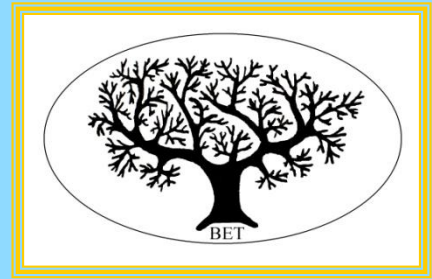


# Backwell Environment Trust

Registered Charity No. 1109406

## Bulletin 19 - Autumn 2010



### A very warm welcome to our latest autumn bulletin

As ever it's been a busy few months for your Trust as we try to get all of our ever expanding wildflower meadows cut ready in time for next year's growth. The highlight though was the presentation of our domed crystal and certificate signed by the Queen which BET has been presented with as part of the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service.

To help you find your way around our action packed bulletin the contents are listed below :

**The View from the Chair**

**BET AGM 2010**

**Chairman's Report**

**Queen's Award**

**Woodland Report**

**Cave Creatures**

**Aliens in the Woods?**

**Backwell Biodiversity**

**Apples and Orchards**

**Memories of Backwell Hill**

**The New BET Website**



## The View From The Chair



With this Bulletin you receive notice of our Annual General Meeting to be held on **Saturday November 27<sup>th</sup>** in the Parish Hall at 2.30pm (doors open at 2pm). Our guest speaker will be local historian and BET member, Norma Knight, who will tell us all about the history of Backwell Hill. Many of you will know that Norma's recent talk on the history of Backwell, given as part of the

centenary celebrations for the Parish Hall, was a complete sell out. **Please** attend the AGM if you possibly can. We need at least 10% of members to be present to make us quorate and as our membership is quite large, I worry annually that we are not going to make it!

### **Change to BET's Constitution to Cover Historical Aspects of the Nature Reserves**

One of the great features of our nature reserves and adjoining areas is their history. We have 17<sup>th</sup> century lead mines, a 19<sup>th</sup> century lime kiln and the remains of a 14<sup>th</sup> century rabbit warren and cottage. Nearby, Backwell Cave, which we have not yet managed to acquire, has yielded remains that are 5000 years old and we suspect that investigations might yield further discoveries of an equally ancient kind.

Our constitution however does not explicitly allow us to spend money on historical projects although some trustees believe the power is there implicitly.

We have a proposal from a member (my wife, Barbara) to make changes to our constitutional objectives which would clear up any lingering doubts and we will discuss and vote on this at the AGM. Note that any changes we resolve upon depend on the proposals receiving a two-thirds majority and even then, are subject to approval by the Charity Commission before taking effect.



### **Backwell Cave Wood**

After what seemed a very positive meeting with the new owners about our acquisition of that part of Badgers Wood containing the prehistoric cave, there has been no movement in spite of e-mails, phone calls and a letter from us to them. It may of course have something to do with current financial uncertainties but for the time being we can only wait.

### **Use of the Woods by Local Schools**

Wandering through our woods on a Tuesday morning this term or next, you may come across a class from one of our local infant or junior schools enjoying the great outdoors and learning some woodcraft. They will be under the supervision of North Somerset playrangers who have asked to use the wood for this purpose. This is a new venture for us and we wish our visitors well. Obviously we have had to weigh up the undoubted value of such activities to our community schools against some possible loss of tranquillity in the reserves. We very much want the scheme to be successful on all fronts and we will keep an open mind and review the situation in March next year.

### **Backwell Lake**

Things are moving in Backwell Access Group's quest to get the lakeside path made wheelchair friendly. But progress is slow and it looks as though it will be October/November 2011 before it happens. The late autumn is the best time for undertaking the work from the conservation perspective, avoiding bird nesting, toad spawning and hatching as well as orchid flowering.

This autumn has now been missed because time had to be taken to get the specification and responsibilities sorted out but with any luck the crucial grant application will be in by the imminent deadline and the work started next autumn.

### **BET Trustees**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow trustees for all their hard work throughout a very busy year. Many extra hours have been spent on managing and enhancing the reserves in addition to our routine activity days. Our finances are in good order and ready for the scrutineer. We have organised lots of activities involving planning and leadership with the necessary attendant publicity work and catering. The administration is running smoothly. And all this has been achieved in an harmonious spirit which has made the work rewarding and enjoyable.



**Bill Charnock**

# **BET Annual General Meeting**

**Saturday November 27th 2010**

**Backwell Parish Hall**

The hall will be open from 2pm with displays and information about BET & other related organisations.

Your trustees will be on hand to answer any questions you may have and to listen to any suggestions for BET, its activities past, present and future.

After the short official business there will be a break for tea, coffee and cakes followed by a talk by Norma Knight on the history and development of Backwell Hill.



## **Agenda**



- ❖ Minutes of the AGM held on November 28<sup>th</sup> 2009
- ❖ Treasurer's Report
- ❖ Chairman's Report
- ❖ Election of officers and trustees
- ❖ Amendment to the Constitution & any other business

The Annual Report for 2009 - 2010 and a nomination form for trustees and officers are included with this bulletin. The minutes of our last AGM and the annual accounts will be available at the meeting.

**Volunteer Activity Mornings** - on the **SECOND THURSDAY** and the **FOURTH SATURDAY** of every month starting at 10 am on both days and continuing for about 2 hours or as long as your energy lasts.

The tasks will change as the woodland year progresses and can vary according to your strength and interests. Please wear stout footwear and suitable old clothes.

We **always** break at about 11am for large amounts of chat, tea and biscuits.

Meet at the lower entrance to Jubilee Stone Wood outside No17 Church Town just before 10am or telephone in advance to find out where we shall be working (01275 463315).

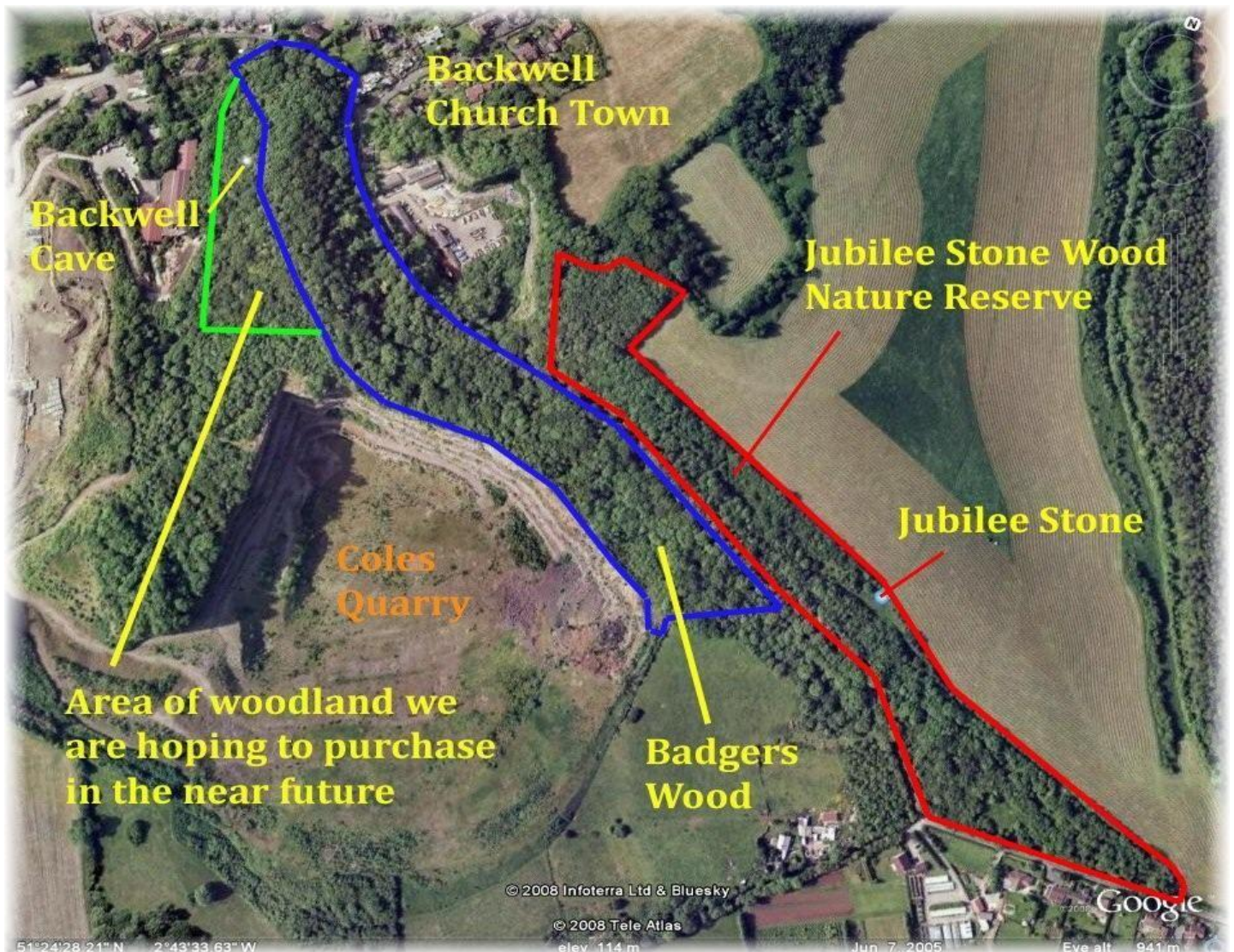
**BACKWELL ENVIRONMENT TRUST**  
**ANNUAL REPORT**  
**OCTOBER 1<sup>ST</sup> 2009 TO SEPTEMBER 30<sup>TH</sup> 2010**  
REGISTERED CHARITY 1 109406

**B**ET's formal objectives, as they appear in our Charity Commission registration, are shown in the box at the end of this report. In practical terms, we have to manage our holdings to promote biodiversity and environmental good practice and to create a valuable recreational and educational resource for Backwell and the public in general.

The scheme of this report is as follows. The first two sections deal with the two major events of the year; the acquisition of Badgers Wood and receipt of the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. The third is an account of the many activities we have undertaken over the reporting year and the fourth a summary of the work done on the nature reserves. Finally there is a fifth short section that covers administration of the trust and related items.

### **1. Acquisition of Badgers Wood**

At the start of the reporting period all arrangements for the purchase of that part of the wood (9.75 acres) that Cemex UK Ltd were prepared to sell to us were in place. Boundaries and responsibilities for them had been agreed after long and convoluted negotiations. Finance was in place, thanks to the generosity and patience of YANSEC acting for the Landfill Levy, who provided the bulk of the purchase price, and to the North Somerset Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund (a tax on quarrying) which granted the 'seed' money. Similarly, agreement had been reached with the owner of the two acres at the top south-eastern end of the wood. Accordingly on November 7<sup>th</sup> 2009 the wood became the property of the Trust. Our total current holdings are shown in the map below.



Unfortunately the area that Cemex was prepared to sell to us did not include the 3.25 acres adjacent to the buildings in Cole's Quarry and containing the pre-historic Backwell Cave (see map). This has been a great disappointment to us and we have of course made approaches to the new owners of the quarry in the hope that they would sell. So far we have had no success but our efforts continue.

Another setback was the discovery in Badgers Wood of a number of dangerous trees close to the road which required immediate attention. This was paid for partly by another grant from the North Somerset Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund and partly from BET's own resources.

This Aggregates Levy grant also paid for some boundary fencing, a gate to the restricted area of Badgers Wood, a length of path suitable for wheel chairs and creation of a viewpoint overlooking the quarry and the Bristol Channel. Connection of the wheelchair-friendly path to the road is scheduled for completion in the next reporting period.

A celebration of the acquisition of Badgers Wood was held on Sunday May 16<sup>th</sup> in the Horse-ring at the top of Jubilee Stone Wood, there being no suitable sites with good access in Badgers Wood. Guided walks, refreshments and various other woodland activities were provided with music by Congresbury Brass and Nailsea Sessioners Folk Group.



## **2. The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service**

On June 2<sup>nd</sup>, the anniversary of the accession of Queen Elizabeth II, Backwell Environment Trust was given the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. This is a signal honour equivalent to an MBE for an individual and we are very grateful to our Parish Council clerk, Jane Stone for nominating us.

Fittingly. Backwell's historic Jubilee Stone was the setting for the presentation of the award, a signed citation from the Queen and a crystal memento. After a rainy morning, the afternoon of Awards Day, Saturday September 11<sup>th</sup>, was unexpectedly warm and pleasant. The Lord Lieutenant of Somerset, Lady Gass, was due to make the presentation but in her unavoidable absence was represented by deputy Lord Lieutenants, Brian Tanner and Steve Pilkington. The ceremony was attended by six of our parish councillors led by chairman Colin Pope, district councillor Tom Collinson and a large group of BET members.

Over 100 BET members have undertaken voluntary physical work in the nature reserves since BET started in 2004 with another cohort of volunteers leading walks, making presentations and talks, running courses and undertaking the various necessary administrative tasks of an accountable registered charity.

## **3. BET Events and Activities**

We have continued our regular sessions of woodland management by BET volunteers. These are held on the second Thursday and fourth Saturday of each month. Taken with other ad hoc work sessions as and when required and time spent on educational and administrative activities we have recorded **2,254** hours of work donated by volunteers.

Events have included an illustrated presentation by Joe McSorley of the Avon Wildlife Trust on Dormice at our AGM in November. Trustee Ian Chambers also made a presentation to our AGM and to the annual meeting of Backwell Parishioners in April on the development of our nature reserves. Guided winter and summer nature walks were held, led by trustees Carrie Riches and Caroline Hoult respectively while trustees Mike and Avril Marks led bat detection walks in June and September.



Member Trevor Riddle of the RSPB and colleagues did their annual springtime inspection and refurbishment of nest boxes in Jubilee Stone Wood while trustees Mike Marks and Bill Charnock did the same in Badgers Wood. Trustees also represented BET at an exhibition at Tyntesfield in June and a guided tour of mining areas in and around our woods was led by local expert Nick Richards in July.

Trustees Ian and Ann Chambers, Amanda Swannell and Caroline Hoult organised activities in the woods to assist Backwell School in an enrichment week. Trustee Ann Chambers looks after publicity and media helped by Barbara Charnock who is also responsible for the minutes of meetings.

Many members and trustees put in considerable efforts to make a success of both the Celebration Day on May 16<sup>th</sup> and the Award Day on September 11<sup>th</sup>. Particular mention should be made of the help given by Andrew Town, Terry Smith and Tony Smith who organised the very popular pond-dipping and bug-hunting activities.

BET continues to support and collaborate with the North Somerset Parish Wildlife Wardens, the Backwell Fairtrade Café, Backwell Access Group (of wheelchair users), TENONS (The Environmental Network of North Somerset) and Nailsea Environment and Wildlife Trust (NEWT). It also now supports Sustainable Backwell in its activities on transport, energy and food.

#### **4. Work in Badgers Wood and Jubilee Stone Wood Nature Reserves**

Badgers Wood has been the main focus of activity this year. There has been extensive clearance of the hawthorn thicket and other areas at the top south-eastern end of the site to recreate the original limestone meadow. A boundary fence and access gate have been erected and a viewing site with bench created which will eventually have wheelchair access from Cheston Combe. At the bottom end of the wood there has been more meadow clearance, replacement of steps on the steep path and refurbishment of the building there once used as a garage. In Cheston Combe, close to the road, an old but well-preserved cistern has been excavated to create a pond.

In Jubilee Stone Wood the emphasis has been mainly on maintenance and consolidation. This has involved grass cutting and bracken control in the Horse-ring, Jubilee Stone area, the new coupe and bridleway areas mostly by hand scythe. Some further dry stone walling has also been undertaken.

#### **5. Trust Administration**

##### **Trustees' meetings**

The trustees have met on seven occasions during the reporting period usually on a weekday evening at Backwell School. Note that since its inception the trust has allowed and encouraged all members to attend and participate in these meetings.

##### **Bulletins**

Three bulletins have been issued in the reporting period (numbers 16, 17 and 18).

##### **Membership**

On September 30th 2010 there were **284** members, compared with **294** in 2009 and **263** in 2008.

##### **Backwell Lake**

BET is supporting the Backwell Access Group (BAG) which has obtained permission from Wessex Water to make the lake perimeter accessible to wheelchairs. BET is helping BAG with planning aspects and general advice since the path will be of similar construction to those in our reserves.

##### **Formal reports to the Charity Commission**

BET has submitted to the Charity Commission as required formal reports and accounts for the period from Oct 1<sup>st</sup> 2008 to Sep 30<sup>th</sup> 2009. Accounts for the current period (2009/10) will require independent examination and certification prior to submission because with the grant for Badgers Wood, income for the year is above the stipulated threshold value.

##### **Conclusion**

I believe this annual report demonstrates that Backwell Environment Trust has achieved its formal objectives.

Bill Charnock ~ 30<sup>th</sup> Sept 2010

## **Acknowledgements**

BET gratefully acknowledges help and support from The Yanley and North Somerset Environmental Company (YANSEC, Landfill Levy), the North Somerset Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund, Backwell Parish Council and our numerous members, supporters and donors.



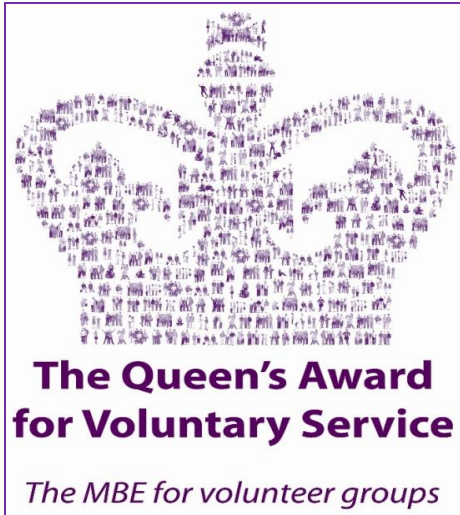
### **BET's Constitutional Objects**

(selected from model objects suggested by the Charity Commission)



- To promote for the benefit of the public the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment by promoting biodiversity.
- To advance the education of the public in the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment.

# The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service



As you know, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 2010, Backwell Environment Trust was awarded the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service, the MBE for voluntary groups. This prestigious national honour is the highest award that can be given to voluntary groups and recognises the outstanding contributions made to local communities by groups devoting their time for the benefit of others. Four trustees attended a Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace in July but BET was also presented with an engraved domed glass crystal and a certificate signed by the Queen at a local ceremony in September.



## BET'S QUEEN'S AWARD PRESENTATION

You know how it is, you plan something for months and then you wake up on your chosen day to find it pouring with rain and overcast - ah the joys of living in England ! Such was Saturday,



September 11<sup>th</sup> when we were due to be presented with BET's domed crystal and certificate in the meadow next to the Jubilee Stone at 2:30pm. However, after a few minutes of frantic weather 'googleing', the forecast for the rest of the day didn't seem all that bad so we bravely set off to put up the marquee and other tents next to the Stone. It's funny how when you're working to a strict deadline everything seems to be much more complicated and so it was with the many pieces of the marquee frame, but fortunately after a lot of head scratching and mutterings, all the tents were finally put up by lunchtime. So it was off for a

quick bite and then straight back to meet our honoured guests. Lady Gass, who was going to give the presentation unfortunately had to cancel at the last minute, so her place was taken by Brian

Tanner, Steve Pilkington (both Deputy Lieutenants) and Sue Paddick from the Lord Lieutenants Office.

By the time our guests were arriving at the nature reserve, the sun was shining, blue skies prevailed and the temperature was pleasantly warm. Brian Tanner, who is the chairman of the Awards Committee, gave the presentation speech and then handed our award to Bill, BET's hard working chairman. With the official business over, it was time for a few photos for the album and then, in true BET style, we dived straight into the tea and home-made cakes.

Around 60 BET members and supporters were present at the ceremony, including many from the Parish Council together with the chairman, Colin Pope and our district councillor, Tom Collinson. Suitably fortified, we all then set off for a short guided tour of some of the highlights of both Jubilee Stone and Badgers Wood, taking in the new(ish) 'coupe' wildflower meadow, the limekiln and the brand new spectacular viewpoint. At around 5 o'clock, we waved our guests goodbye, forlornly looked in vain for any un-eaten cakes, took down the tents and went home to put our tired feet up after what was a very successful and enjoyable day.

Ann Chambers



**BET's Domed Glass Crystal & Certificate**



# Woodland Report

At this time of the year the tasks on BET's nature reserves can be easily summed up in one word -

## HAYMAKING !

Forty years ago, most of Backwell Hill was open pasture land and since we have taken on the management of both Jubilee Stone and Badgers Wood Nature Reserves we have been busy re-establishing, at least in part, some of those long lost wildflower meadows. Every year in late summer/early autumn, all of our grasslands are now cut and the hay crop removed from the meadow. This has many beneficial effects -

**Firstly**, the amount of cut grass we remove from the meadows is enormous - certainly well over a tonne in weight. If it wasn't removed, most of this material would die back over the winter period and be re-absorbed by the soil leading to an increase in it's fertility. However, whilst all plants would I'm sure prefer to grow in a rich, fertile soil, wildflowers seem to be able to tolerate low fertility levels better than most, so if we can reduce the soil's fertility we favour their growth at the expense of other plants less welcome in the meadow.



**Cutting the Meadows**

**Secondly**, un-grazed meadows are constantly under attack from invading scrub such as bramble, traveller's-joy and tree seedlings. If these competitors aren't removed on an annual basis they would swamp the meadow in the space of a few years, so these plants will get removed at the same time as the grass cutting.

**Thirdly**, the very act of grass cutting results in a lot of seed dispersal and trampling of the soil by our volunteers, especially after a long tea break with far too many teas and biscuits eaten. As the scythe blade cuts, seeds are dislodged and scattered over a wide area only to be subsequently pressed into the soil by our boots, giving the perfect start in life for a wildflower seedling!

### BET Volunteers

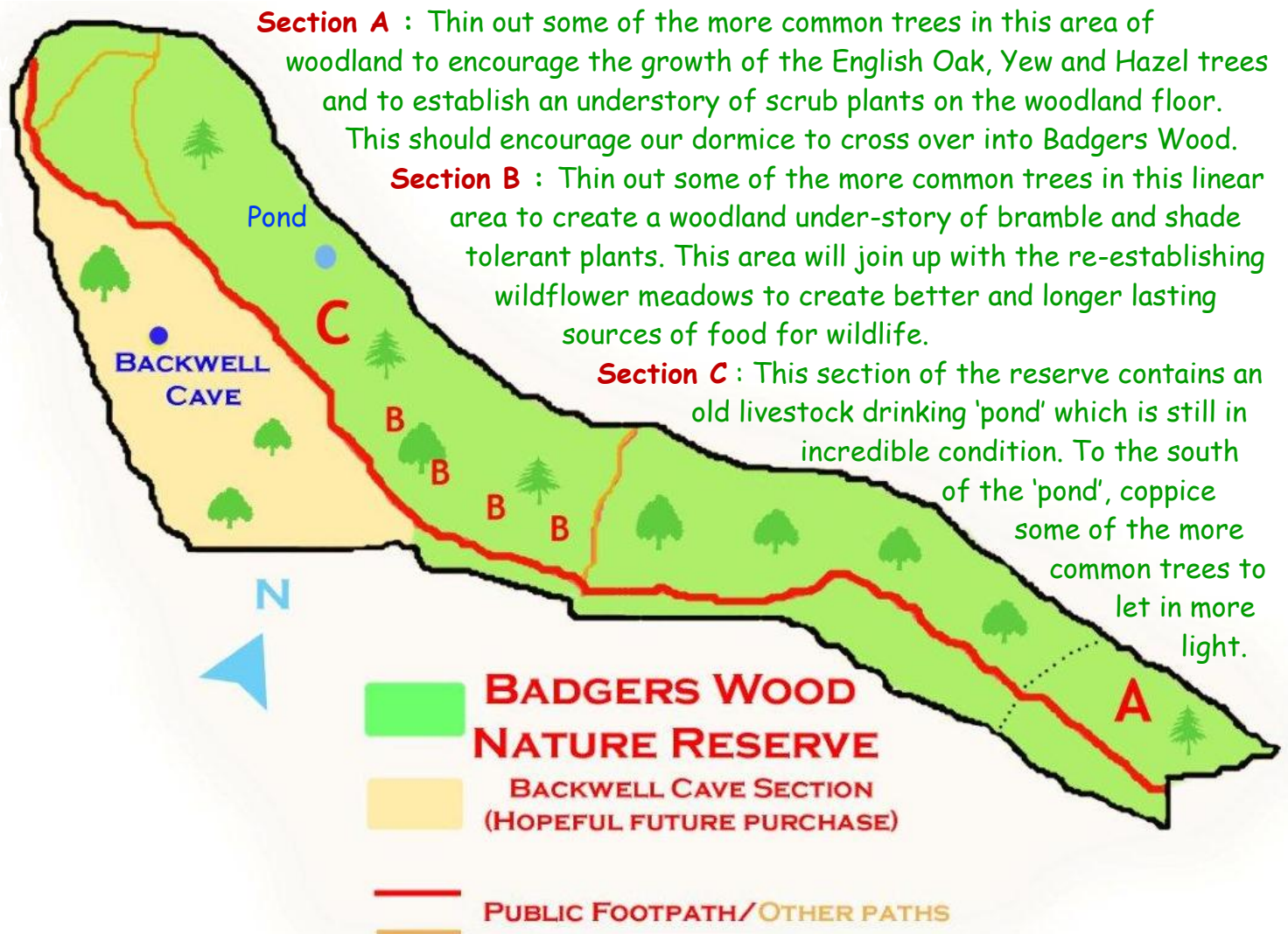
Over the past year, the trusty BET volunteers have put in the amazing total of **2254** volunteer hours into the running of BET and managing our two nature reserves. To put this into some context, this is the same as if we had someone working over 8½ hours, 5 days a week, 52 weeks of the year and, even on the minimum wage, this effectively saves the Trust a whopping **£13,073** a year!

It is no exaggeration to say that the success of BET is solely due to the quality and hard work of our volunteers, so a **BIG BET THANK YOU** to you all.



## Proposals for Future Woodland Projects in Badgers Wood

In our autumn bulletin of 2009 we put forward our plans to improve the biodiversity of our newly acquired second nature reserve, Badgers Wood. Since then we have been busy implementing these projects with great success. However, we would now like to propose a few more subtle changes to be carried out over the coming years, mainly concerned with creating areas of woodland where more light can reach the forest floor to encourage shade tolerant plants and brambles.



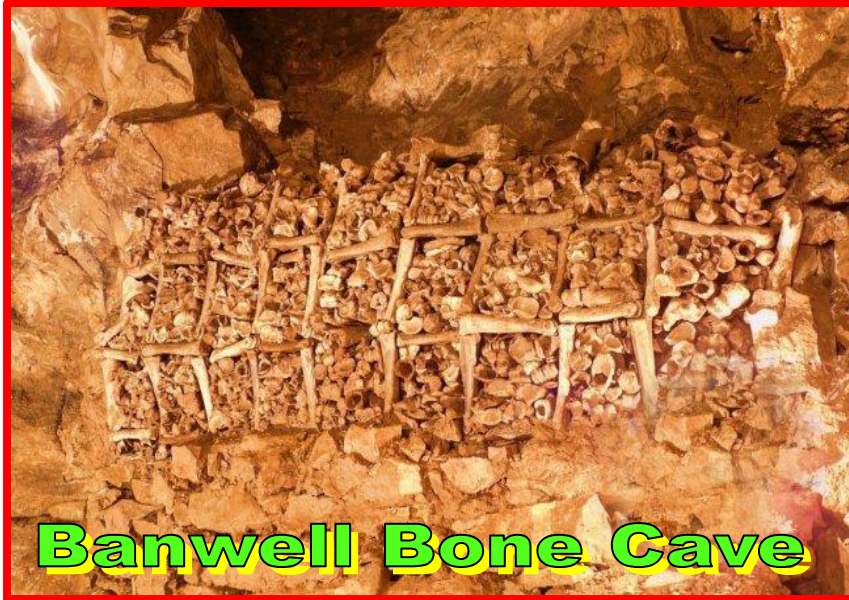
**PS :** We are hoping to run a **hedge-laying training day** in the new year so look out for advertisements on e-mail and in the local press.

Ian Chambers

## The Curious Case of the Cave Creatures

In 1821 quarrymen in Kirkdale, Yorkshire found a hyena's den with hundreds of half-eaten bones, including tiger, elephant, lion and hippos who lived during a warm period in the earth's climate over 100,000 years ago. The entrance was less than a metre wide, so the bones would have been dragged in by the hyenas over a long period of time. In our local Somerset area, too, there are a few caves which also contain a mixture of bones from native, exotic or extinct animals, including Banwell Cave, Gough's Cave and Aveline's and Wookey Holes, all found in the 18<sup>th</sup>

and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Perhaps the least well-known, and most recent discovery, is the Cave at Westbury-sub-Mendip found in 1969, which when opened up by quarrying, contained a pile of animal bones 30 metres high with the top ones literally tumbling out. These included primitive



cave bears and rhinos, hyenas, jaguars, dhole (wild dog) and hundreds of voles, dating from 700,000 - 40,000 years ago when the climate ranged from warm and temperate to a more recent colder period.

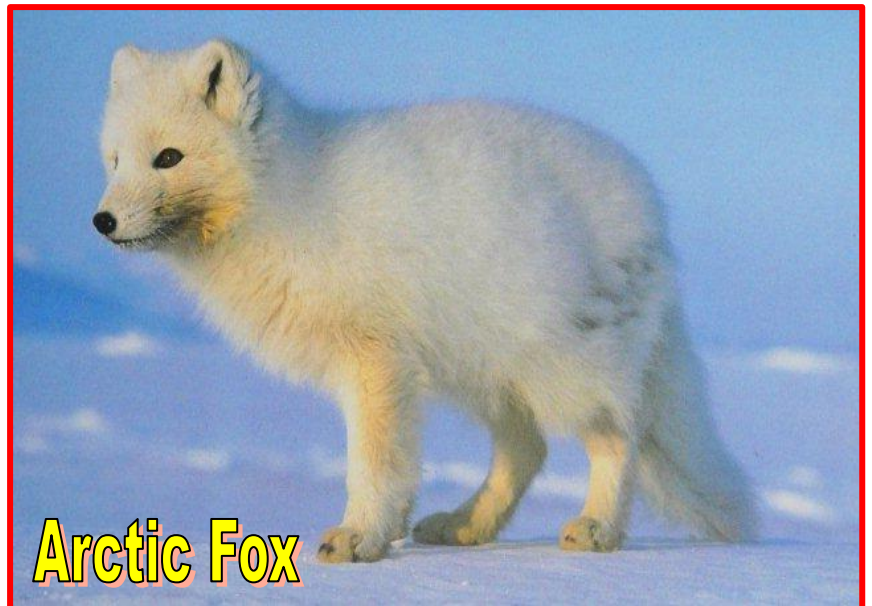
Banwell Cave (opened in 1825) also contains many thousands of bones which have been stacked up in decorative piles against the walls. The majority are bison and reindeer with rarer species like arctic foxes and hares, wolverines and huge brown bears with enormous claws. They lived in a

cold period over 75,000 years ago when Britain was still joined to the Continent and when the bison and reindeer were part of large migrating herds, their remains washed into the cave in a tangled mass by the melting snow. In none of these three Caves have any human bones been identified.

**So why were all these strange animals here?**

It must be remembered that many caves were found in the late 1700-1800s and at that time there was absolute faith in the teachings of the Bible, which was considered sacrosanct. Therefore it was believed that the animals were all washed away and drowned in Noah's Flood, then buried when the Earth's crust reformed afterwards. Today we know what the animals all look like from zoos and various television documentaries, but in those days they were totally unknown and people refused to believe they had ever existed at all.

The Reverend William Buckland, Professor of Geology at Oxford and a keen naturalist, asked this question in the 1820s and began the first scientific approach to the Biblical Flood idea by looking for geological evidence to support the Scriptures. He excavated Kirkdale Cave, finding over 75 hyena skeletons and 300 teeth and, to identify their bite-marks on the other bones, imported a live one from Africa, intending to study, then kill it and keep the skeleton. Thankfully he could not bring himself to do this dastardly act, and so 'Billy' lived in his house as a pet for 25 years.



**Arctic Fox**

A truly eccentric British gentleman, the rest of Buckland's menagerie which also lived with him included live guinea pigs, a jackal and a big, tame brown bear called 'Tig' whom he dressed up like a student in cap and gown and was very popular at wine parties! He experimented with food, and

ate his way through the animal kingdom, serving tasty meals such as hedgehog ('good and tender'), crocodile ('a failure') and a delicate toast of mice (no comment!).

With growing public interest in caves, there was a keen rivalry between owners to attract the most visitors, even to the extent of buying in stalagmites to build fake 'fairy grottoes'. Richard Gough bought his Cheddar Cave, (once a gambling den and cart shed) to outdo nearby Cox's Cave. Digging out the cave to reach the stalactite formation meant that over the years, by 1898, roughly 1,000 tons of sediment had been removed which contained bones of extinct giant ox,

arctic hare, two species of lemmings plus birds like black grouse, ptarmigan and whooper swan. There are probably still many more bones in the sediment, which is now buried underneath the road through the Gorge.

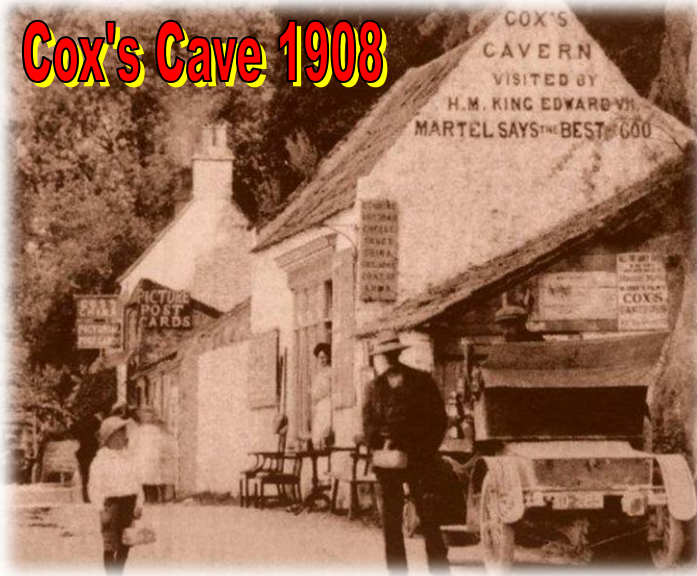
In 1902, remains of young 'Cheddar Man' and four other people were found who lived over 15,000 years ago near the end of the last Ice Age when winters were drier and colder but summers much hotter than today. Mention must be made of the claims of cannibalism in the cave from cut-marks on the bones, but it is now thought that these were probably part of a funerary ritual and/or extraction of marrow

from the bones to help survive the colder weather. At that time Britain was joined to the Continent by a wide land bridge, and today fishing trawlers' nets still dredge up mammoth, woolly rhinos and reindeer bones from 20-50 metres below the sea surface.

This has been a short, but I hope interesting, look at animal and human bones discovered in some local caves. Sadly, Backwell Cave remains may only date back 5,000 years and all the animals found there are still around today. However there may be other hidden caves amongst the rocks, with their secrets still awaiting discovery.

Jenny Greenslade

## Cox's Cave 1908



## Aliens in the Woods ?

Alongside the usual trees and flowers to be found in the BET woodlands, there are quite a number of plants which haven't occurred naturally. Firstly there are the deliberate introductions, including Scots Pines on both sides of Cheston Combe and, until recently, there was also a large Larch tree. Within the past 20 years, planning regulations made at the time of the footpath alterations to allow quarrying extensions, led to the planting of the purple leaved variety of the Norway Maple and a group of Poplars in the recently thinned clearing next to the quarry edge. Rather surprisingly, both Beech and Sycamore trees are not true natives in our area but have become naturalised and spread freely. The fine Common Limes edging the combe and beside the bridle-path would also have been deliberately planted in the past. They can no longer self-seed due to changes in the climate, unlike the two non-native oaks, the evergreen Holm Oak and the



Turkey Oak both produce acorns and spread all too freely, although both can make handsome mature trees.

Other plants are associated with remnants of old buildings, this is particularly so next to the old cottage near to the lower entrance of Badgers Wood, whose rocky remains are now nearly invisible. The old garden plants here include sheets of Periwinkle, some Cherry Laurels, a substantial Bay tree and clumps of daffodils.

The next group of plants owe their presence to the un-thoughtful dumping of garden waste in the past. The Box Honeysuckle (*Lonicera Nitida*) has rooted from hedge trimmings in both of our nature reserves and has been quite difficult for us to remove. More attractively there are a few



clumps of Snowdrops, Yellow Loosestrife, Crocosmia and Aquilegia in and around the Horse-ring. Spanish Bluebells threaten to invade up the bridle path and the variegated variety of the Yellow Archangel could be a bit of a menace although the green leaved form is a welcome native.

And finally, there is a group of plants who have made their own way on to BET's nature reserves, with help principally from birds and the wind. Currants, gooseberries and several different varieties of cotoneasters can be found together with some non-native

Viburnums and Euonymus have occasionally appeared. Several different varieties of apples are growing extremely well especially in the upper sections of Jubilee Stone Wood. These are not the true, wild Crab apple but probably grew from the pips of discarded apples long ago. The wind has blown in Rosebay Willow Herb and Buddleia also soon colonises any bare ground.

Most of these plants add character and interest to our woodlands and with a few exceptions can be fairly easily controlled should they become too rampant. **So maybe not all aliens are bad!**

Jean Glasson



## "Backwell Makes a Stand Against Biodiversity Loss"

Could this make a headline in a local paper before the end of the year? BET is already doing its bit in the two woodlands it owns, opening them up to the light to increase the range of plants, shrubs and trees so that other wildlife can flourish. But Backwell as a whole could do much more if we took action in our own gardens or nearby public space; gardening organically, leaving a bit of lawn un-mown or growing native, insect-friendly plants.

2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity and as I write a United Nation's Convention is being held in Japan to review targets set in 2002. From this we already know that every country has



failed to meet its targets and that the biodiversity of genes, species and ecosystems is in continuous decline.

I know from my own experience that there are far fewer insects about than there were 20 years ago when our house would be full of them if we left a window open and a light on at night. And 20 years ago there were far fewer than in my childhood. Fewer insects mean fewer birds, bats, depleted ecosystems and a lack of vital pollinators for our crops.

Backwell is full of expert gardeners and I am sure a real difference could be made if we each incorporated a bit or even a lot of biodiversity development into our gardening plans.

Barbara Charnock

## Apples & Orchards

It's hard to believe but in the UK we have an amazing 6,000 varieties of apple and in the last century it was not unheard of for a single orchard to contain over 200 different strains. Unfortunately in England as a whole, land containing apple orchards has declined by 63% over the past sixty years whilst in some counties like Kent, that decline is closer to 92%. In the Backwell area we still have many old orchards left but a fair few are neglected with many of the trees in them reaching the end of their natural life. Jubilee Stone Wood however has many examples of apple trees - some of which are distinctly edible!



### Apple Folklore

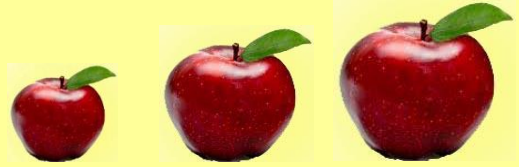
*The apple has long held a special place in the folklore of many cultures throughout the world and especially so in the south-west of England.*

### Health & Longevity

Apples, cider and cider vinegar have always featured widely in folk remedies for many ailments including warts, gout, rheumatism, kidney and bladder stones and colds. Even the mere scent of apples was believed to restore health and vitality to the elderly and infirm. In Norse and Roman legends, apples were even reputed to endow eternal life to their gods. Closer to home, life giving apples have long been associated with the Isle of Avalon (from *afal*, the Welsh for apple), a land full of sunlit orchards where the inhabitants would never age and where the mortally wounded King Arthur was returned to be healed.



# Fertility, Love & Marriage



The Celts decorated the nuptial bedchamber with apple blossom to promote fruitfulness whilst apple wood was often burned during fertility rites during the winter months to guarantee the safe return of spring - as well as to ensure large, healthy families!

Apples are reputed to be essential in the prediction of your future wife or husband. One way to do this was to name apple pips after the likely candidates and stick them on your cheeks - the last pip to fall was the man or woman you would marry. Alternatively the named pips could all be thrown into the fire whereupon the one that bounced the highest would definitely indicate true love.

# Orchards



Apple groves were regarded as sacred by the Druids and even when the Romans arrived, they too considered orchards to be on hallowed ground. In many parts of the world, anyone destroying an apple tree could face dire punishment as both the trees and the orchards were thought to harbour spirits.

Many customs existed to encourage the trees to bear fruit in abundance. Apple trees would be shaken, have nails or pegs driven into them, threatened, shot at and whipped. Barren trees were often presumed to be male and so they were dressed in petticoats and other finery to encourage them to be more female.

In the south-west of England, 'wassailing' is still practiced today in some apple and cider orchards.

Wassailing is meant to wake the trees out of their winter slumber as well as driving out any mischievous spirits, guaranteeing a good crop. On old Twelfth Night (17<sup>th</sup> January) or old Christmas Eve (5<sup>th</sup> January), men would go into the orchards with their wassail bowls, hot cakes or slices of bread. These offerings were then placed at the foot of each tree whilst some cider was poured over the roots - the rest, of course, being liberally drunk. To drive away those pesky evil spirits, the men and boys fired off shotguns and pistols whilst the women and children shouted as loudly as they could. Trees that were less productive in apples were often not honoured in this way but there was a strong belief that the more productive ones would cease to produce apples if the wassailing ritual was not performed.



Ian Chambers



# Memories of Backwell Hill ?

**Do you have any childhood memories of the Backwell Hill area that you would like to share with us?**

Very often memories of times gone by can be incredibly valuable to the Trust and could help us enormously with the long-term restoration of our nature reserves.

So please do get in touch & tell us your memories of the 'Hill' either by letter, e-mail or telephone

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## The New BET Website



For the last few years, BET has taken advantage of a free website service offered by British Telecom which, although a little limiting in what it could do, all-in-all has served us pretty well. Unfortunately this service will come to an end in late October 2010 so we have been looking at the other alternatives. The Trustees have decided to use a low cost website provider which will give us many advantages over the old free service including a proper website name, much better graphics and interactive services. Setting up a new website from scratch however has taken a large amount of time so BET is incredibly grateful to one of our loyal volunteers, Chris Hault, who has put in many hours of hard work to finally make our new website a reality.

All being well, we are hoping to launch the new website at the BET AGM on the 27<sup>th</sup> November.

## Backwell Lake & Netcott's Meadow Local Conservation in Action

Andrew Town will be giving a lavishly illustrated talk on Backwell Lake and the adjacent Netcott's Meadow for the Nailsea Avon Wildlife Trust on the evening of Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> January 2011. It will cover the huge variety of wildlife to be found there and the changing landscapes throughout the seasons.

It's scheduled to start at 7:45pm in the United Reform Church in Nailsea. The talk is open to AWT members and non members alike; entry is only £2 which will include either tea or coffee and a biscuit during the interval.