

# Quantock Hills

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



August 2021

Summer Newsletter - Issue 14



## It's all about Bats

As many readers will be aware, we on the Quantock Hills are batty about bats! For the last eight years we have been running a monitoring scheme learning more about the different species that call the Quantock Hills home. Bats are the only mammal that truly flies and have developed echolocation to navigate and hunt at night.

In celebration of their 30<sup>th</sup> birthday the Bat Conservation Trust are running a month long series of events where you can find out more about these fascinating creatures - [BatFest - Conferences & Symposia - Bat Conservation Trust \(bats.org.uk\)](https://www.bats.org.uk). To link with this the AONB Service will be running a 'Creatures of the Night' walk in September – more info on our website shortly.



Photo by K. Coates.

## Cothelstone Hill Excavation

by Dan Broadbent, Historic Heritage Officer



After much delay, the QLPS launched our community archaeology project, *Understanding the Landscape*, with a two-week excavation on the top of Cothelstone Hill. The aim of the dig was to try to confirm the age of a 'cross-ridge dyke', an earthwork bank and ditch which runs for some 280m, roughly north to south across the top of the hill and which, despite no previous excavations having been carried out, was widely believed to date from the Iron Age.



However, the timely arrival of the results of our LiDAR survey just prior to the start of the dig, revealed that rather than a linear feature, the earthwork in fact forms part of an enclosure, encircling a good part of the top of the hill. There is also a suggestion that the origins of the structure might date back much earlier than had previously been thought, perhaps as far back as the Neolithic.



Volunteer diggers, many of whom had no previous archaeological experience, were recruited from the surrounding area, as well as from community groups that the QLPS are working with. Under the guidance of archaeologists from the South West Heritage Trust, the team worked valiantly through extremes of weather, experiencing temperatures of 30 degrees

C during the first week, and dodging torrential showers during the second.

A good deal was learnt about the construction of the earthwork, with evidence suggesting it was originally topped with drystone walling which subsequently collapsed in one rapid phase of destruction. Finds included a good number of flint flakes and some fragile fragments of prehistoric pottery. We also recovered some charcoal samples which will be radiocarbon dated to help narrow down the age of the feature.

The excavations were recorded in a series of three short films, produced for us by The Local Film Company, which can be found on our YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC4cq8TG6clOvrWd7vs7lvpQ>



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## QLPS Community Mural

A huge piece of community engagement work has happened for the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme with the delivery of a series of community nature murals in Woolaway, North Taunton.

The plan was to work closely with residents, uniting a community in the project, but also creating a space for an emotional release of energy after isolation, and opening up conversations about nature and local wildlife. The project included a trip to the hills for local residents (many of whom had never been there in over two decades of living locally), and across three weekends in late May and early June we worked with the residents to paint their own nature murals across the neighbourhood, bringing the colour and wildlife of the Quantock Hills to the doorstep.

The first weekend saw over 45 people turn up to show their support – and across just two days on a swelteringly hot bank holiday weekend, they managed to paint 30metres of hoardings.

We commissioned regional illustrator and mural artist, [Dave Bain](#), from his excellent track record of working with communities and his colourful, quirky, nature-themed subjects. Having Dave on the project really helped to develop our audiences and build meaningful community connections. In total we managed to cover three locations, 90 metres of community space, and engage around 110 people in the project.



QLPS have been busy creating a community mural in Taunton.

## Exploring Quantock's Acidic Mires

Mires, bogs, fens – there are many names and types of wetland and on the Quantock Hills we have some wonderful areas of acidic mires. According to Natural England there is over 16Ha of acidic mire and on a wet and gloomy day in July a number of volunteers were fortunate enough to explore one of these areas with John Andrews (Friends of Quantock) and Dr James McGill (AEcol) as part of the Levels Up Project.



The acidic mires are fascinating dynamic

habitats with a vast diversity of plant and animal life. They are fragile though and can be easily damaged or degraded through disturbance, reduction in water flow, over grazing or under grazing. During the training day we were able to see how these mires can be brought back into good condition through the work that Friends of Quantock have done on their land. It was great to see the vast range of plants that can be found in the mires, such as Bog Asphodel, with its tall spiky bright yellow flowers, or the round-leaved sundew, which eats insects!



This autumn, through the Levels Up Project, we will be enhancing two acidic mire sites on

Quantock Common

This training was provided as part of the Levels Up Project. Funded through Defra's Green Recovery Challenge Fund, the project is a partnership of organisations working across the Mendip Hills, Blackdown Hills and Quantock Hills Areas of Outstanding Natural

Beauty (AONBs) in Somerset to deliver nature recovery and engagement activities that enhance habitats and connections for wildlife between the Hills and the Levels.

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QUANTOCK HILLS  
BLACKDOWN HILLS  
MENDIP HILLS  
Three of the  
AONB Family

## Summer Fun with QLPS

Our 'Prehistoric Family Fun Day' took place on Saturday 17th July to great success. We engaged the services of ancient craftspeople and re-enactors from Newhaven Coppice and the event was also supported by Finds Liaison Officers from the Portable Antiquities Scheme providing a Finds Surgery and Object Handling. The event attracted approximately 296 visitors on one of the hottest days of the year – with some travelling from as far afield as Newton Abbot and Shaftsbury.



We have also been engaging in lots of other summer activities across neighbourhoods at the doorstep of the hills. We have had a very active period in North Taunton with the Priorswood summer activity days. On our first week of activities we attracted around 300 people, with over 30 tote bags being printed with the motto 'Inspired by the Quantock Hills', and our most recent attendance saw up to 65 t-shirts being printed and painted by local families, all with the same inspiring motto. The queues for our stand were overwhelmingly long all day and we've had lots of happy faces wearing their t-shirts ever since. On a recent trip to the hills for a picnic with residents from Priorswood it was lovely to see those same t-shirts being worn in the landscape.

Similarly, we have worked closely with partners LiveWest in bringing activities to their local doorstep, and we enjoyed an afternoon of printing, painting and craft – giving away bags printed for each house number and a plant for each person to grow for their neighbour. We're looking forward to more activities across the area and beyond, with future projects in Stockmoor, and the latest in a series of Photo Walks. For more information, please see [www.qlps.org](http://www qlps.org)



## Volunteer Celebration BBQ

At the end of July, the AONB and Landscape Partnership volunteers got together with staff for a celebration of the hard-working volunteers with a BBQ, bring and share table, certificates and Somerset themed quiz. The rangers Owen and Andy valiantly barbecued 100 burgers and sausages whilst the volunteers caught up after 18 months of not seeing everyone all at once. A really special occasion, even with the odd downpour!



## QLPS Photo Competition

Rather than the traditional landscape photos of views from and of the hills, we want to look a little deeper and differently at the communities present in the AONB and Landscape Partnership Scheme Area. We are looking for photos which fit the categories village life; people of the Quantocks and Quantock working.



The competition will run until the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022, with photographs judged in April and winners being announced in May 2022.

Find out more [here](#).

## Hedgerow Surveying Volunteers

Volunteers are needed to identify hedgerow species and record the general hedge characteristics within the AONB and QLPS area. Knowledge of the local area would be beneficial but training will be provided. Contact the team at [qlps@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:qlps@somerset.gov.uk)

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The AONB and Landscape Partnership team all together for a catchup and look at the Cothelstone dig.

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### AONB Social Feeds



### Quantock Landscape Partnership Social Feeds

