

Quantock Hills AONB

Nationally protected; naturally beautiful

Annual Report 2016/17



Image by Peter Phillips
Photography Competition Entry

Funded by :





Image By Dawn Mahoney
Photo Competition Entry

Highlights

- Quantock Hills AONB 60th Anniversary Celebrations
- Andy Stevenson New AONB Ranger
- Samantha Fraser New Volunteer Co-ordinator
- New AONB Service role offering District Councils specialist Quantock landscape guidance to include with pre-application advice when requested by applicants
- Bat monitoring taken place at 6 sites over 9 evenings
- Adder monitoring taken place at 3 sites
- Quantock volunteers provided 835 hours of their time in 9 months of the period covered, that's an estimated 1100 hours over the whole year
- 4 Volunteer Rangers trained to run Explorer walks
- Cothelstone Hill Management Plan completed includes felling, various planting and removal of sycamore
- Swaling programme completed with 13ha swaled and 2 areas piloted for cut and collect
- Slow the Flow project alongside Somerset Rivers Authority – using woody dams and weaved silver birch hedges to disperse the flow of water off the hills
- Landscape Character Assessment completed
- 143 planning applications monitored in and around the AONB and 26 comments made
- Continued work on HLF Landscape Partnership Bid
- Work placement student from Cannington College working with ranger team 1 day a week
- £28,000 awarded to Greater Quantock Landscape Development Fund projects
- New oak fingerpost for Triscombe Stone
- 8 public events with 248 attendees
- 34 cases of illegal vehicle use monitored
- 41 Fly-tipping incidents recorded and reported

Case Studies

60TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

2016 was the 60th anniversary of the Quantock Hills being designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Quantock Hills AONB was the first such designation in England alongside the Gower Peninsular in Wales.

In June 2016 the AONB Service in partnership with the South West Heritage Trust and Halsway Manor ran the Quantock Experience Week. The week included experiences tailored to show the unique qualities of the Quantock Hills. Talks were given by specialists such as Professor Peter Haggett (Emeritus Professor in Urban and Regional Geography at Bristol University), Tom Mayberry (CEO of South West Heritage Trust), Archaeologist Hazel Riley and Geologist Dr. Andy King. Wildlife walks were led by the Quantock Hills Rangers covering bats, deer, bushcraft and plant identification. There were also discussions about landscape character and a live archaeological dig.

Also in partnership with the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and Splashmaps Ltd, there was a photographic competition, encouraging entrants to submit their best pictures of 2016. The competition closed on 31st March 2017, some of the wonderful entries can be seen here.

from top to bottom

Landscape Category Winner - Frank Clatworthy
Expedition Category Winner - Robert Blake School
Expedition Runner Up (1 of 2) - Sexeys Academy
Landscape Runner Up (1 of 2) - Adam Gerrard

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VOLUNTEERING

The work delivered by the Quantock AONB Service would simply not be possible without the hard work and dedication of our teams of volunteers. We would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to each and every one of them.

There are four groups of volunteers:

- **The Estates Team**, a small group of long-term volunteers who work weekly on conservation and maintenance tasks.
- **Volunteer Rangers**, a specially trained group of 12 rangers specifically for public facing events, guided walks, information points, fetes and talks.
- **Quantock Conservation Volunteers (QCV)** in partnership with the National Trust, this larger group of volunteers work on conservation and maintenance tasks all over the AONB.
- **Quantock Hills Monthly Volunteer Group** is new for this year and has been set up as part of the Nature and wellbeing project. This group offers practical volunteering opportunities with ranger Andy Stevenson and Nature and Wellbeing Project Officer Kristen Lambert. They work closely with partners within Mental Health services and take referrals from Mind in Taunton and West Somerset and Somerset Partnership's Community Mental Health Team in Taunton. Currently 11 volunteers attend on a regular basis with Quantock Volunteer Ranger Nicky Matthews, supporting with delivery too. So far the group have spent time drystone walling, repairing and fitting tree guards, watering newly planted trees and gorse clearance on Cothelstone Hill. The project has received funding from Somerset Community Foundation for the transport costs as this was a barrier to many potential participants.

Case Studies



Tasks carried out this year include:

- Cutting and burning blocks of mature gorse, thinning hawthorn at Cothelstone Hill
- Pulling rhododendron regrowth on north side of Wills Neck
- Repair of the fence at Triscombe Stone car park
- Gate repairs in Lydeard Hill area
- Installation of replacement path signs
- Car park maintenance, incl. cutting back tree branches
- Improvements to the permissive circular walk around the Lime Kiln at Hawkridge Woods
- A series of 5 'manned' information points at car parks during the summer months
- Guided walk training for Volunteer Rangers, funded by HLF
- 4 guided walks led by Volunteer Rangers
- Monitoring of Scheduled Ancient Monuments for annual survey for Historic England
- Hosting Mendip Young Ranger carrying out Beach clean, walk and geology/plant ID session



Case Studies



COTHELSTONE HILL

South West Heritage Trust have a long term lease of Cothelstone Hill, the Quantock Hills AONB Service manages the land on their behalf, and do so in accordance with the Cothelstone Hill Management Plan. A new website was launched this year and can be found at www.cothelstonehill.org

In 2015 a new area of trees adjacent to the Seven Sisters was planted and fenced off, this year those trees have shown to be establishing well. A further 12 Scots pine were planted following a recommendation from the County Arboriculture Specialist to act as protection for the beech trees. A plaque was also installed to commemorate the planting and explain the reason for the trees being there. Removal of sycamore from the hill top has meant that woodland flower species are already returning, such as a new carpet of bluebells.

A series of conservation tasks also took place, with the help of the Quantock volunteers, and where necessary contractors. These included removing an area of scrub south of Seven Sisters and monitoring of the Scheduled Ancient Monuments. The Exmoor Ponies at Cothelstone Hill are checked by the AONB Service 6 days a week. Unfortunately one pony died in September 2016 due to old age, so the herd is now down to 7.



EDF LAND MANAGEMENT & SKILLS SCHEME

A number of initiatives were delivered through the EDF Land Management and Skills Scheme. To help promote and improve traditional Quantock countryside land management skills. These included:

1. Orchards Training – 36 people attended a series of workshops open to local landowners, farmers and communities to promote orchard planting and planning, restoration, management and produce processing.
2. Community Species Monitoring Project - Training and resources to upskill local communities in species monitoring in the 'Greater Quantock' area. Species include bats, birds and butterflies or can be tailored to specific species of interest within the local communities' environment.
3. Resilience Planning (Farming & Forestry) - A series of workshops exploring resilience planning in agriculture and forestry. These will be followed up with one to one support to produce a number of farm or forestry plans.

NATURE AND WELL BEING PROJECT

Year one of this 3 year project was full, busy and successful. It aims to tackle many of the barriers that prevent some people accessing the hills, and improve the mental and physical well being of those who take part. The project runs across the 3 main Somerset AONBs. Nature and Wellbeing Officer Kristen Lambert achieved the following:

- 15 Delivery Partners signed up to the project (eg. Huntstile Farm, National Trust, Somerset Rural Youth Project)
- 21 Health in the community Partners (eg. MIND, Alzheimer's Society, Children Centres)
- 16 Supported sessions with groups
- 22 Promotional events
- 10 On going volunteering opportunities, including Quantock Hills Monthly Volunteering Group
- 4 Training Opportunities



Reading the Landscape Project

Green Days Day Care have been working with the AONB team on a project which is being supported by the National Trust, using Fyne Court as a base for sessions. A group of 6 people from Green Days Day Care Centre have been visiting different sites across the Hills every other Tuesday and through walking, taking photographs and writing poetry they are connecting with the diverse landscapes and recording the impact. The group are also learning how to read OS maps, use a compass and are starting to identify different trees/leaves, plants and birds

The project was developed in collaboration with the AONB's Landscape Planning Officer; feeding off the Landscape Character Assessment work. The findings provide information on perceptions of the landscape and improve our understanding of the special qualities and 'character' of the Quantock Hills. Being part of this important piece of work is giving the group a flavour of the conservation and landscape planning work the Quantock Hills team do. The groups aim to continue their visits throughout the seasons, taking a note of how the landscape changes feeding into the landscape character assessment.

'Feeling relaxed and happy'

Through supporting the group to engage with the landscape more mindfully – encouraging them to stop and listen, noting the sounds, smells and colours, they have started noticing how connecting with the top quality landscapes of the Quantock Hills can make them feel 'relaxed', 'cold on the outside – warm on the inside' and 'tired' due to the 'fresh air'. They have also noticed how they are often more energised and engaged when visiting the different sites, compared to when we go back inside.

Financial Summary 2016 - 2017

Core Income

Defra	155,767
SCC	33,431
TDBC	10,000
SDC	11,500
WSC	1,000
Cost Recovery	11,745
Mendip Hills AONB	8,122
FC Contribution	18,386
Events	194
Total	171,251

Core Expenditure

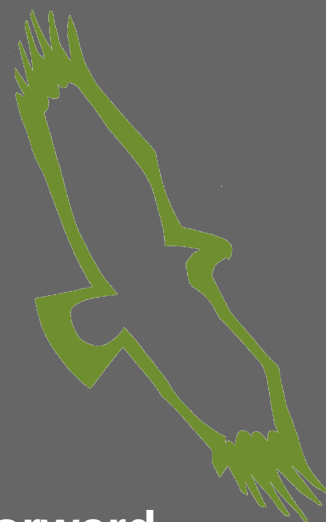
Salaries & on-costs	201,319
Travel	13,973
Training	1,983
Accommodation	22,993
Partnership Budget	2,994
Partnership Running costs	8,997
Total	252,209

Project Budget Income

Historic England - Capacity Building Grant	3,171
Historic England - Sc17	3,000
Somerset County Council	21,404
West Somerset Council - LMSS	5,500
Forestry Commission - LMSS	500
Somerset County Council - Sc106	34,854
Somerset Wildlife Trust	5,000
Brought forward 2016/17 (N&W Project)	43,800
Total	117,229

Receipts in Advance

Carry forward from 2015/16	67,558
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Project Budget Expenditure

GQLDF (Sc106)	28,842
Land Management Skills Scheme (Sc106)	13,553
Nature & Wellbeing Project	24,065
Withymans Pool Protection scheme	2,706
Heritage Monitoring Capacity Building	1,208
Quantock Views Access	2,435
	1,687
	273
Cothelstone Hill Heritage Project	418
CES - Invasive Species	75,187
Total	

Carry Forward

Carry forward to 2017/18	313,860
Allocated - Nature & Wellbeing Project	43,600
Allocated - Redundancy Contingency	14,000
Allocated - Heritage Capacity Building Project	2,569
Allocated - Amenity Land recharge	10,000
Allocated - HLF LP Scheme	10,000
Surplus / Deficit	394,029

Staff Changes



A new full time Ranger for the Quantock Hills, Andrew Stevenson started in August 2016 having previously worked for Somerset County Council's Rights of Way Team. Andy replaced Rebekah West as she left the AONB Service in May to become Area Ranger for the National Trust's team in the Mendips. Thank you to Rebekah for her excellent work in the Quantocks.



A new Volunteer Coordinator Samantha Fraser started in March 2017, and replaced Nichola Penn who left to expand her business in botanical soaps called Boo Cottage Botanicals.

Communications Officer Georgie Grant also left in March to concentrate fully on her key role with Onion Collective CIC (Community Interest Company). The Communications Officer post has been incorporated into a new full time Communications and Support Officer post which Katy Coate (former Support Assistant) successfully applied for.

We wish Rebekah, Nichola and Georgie the best of luck in their new roles, and offer a warm welcome to Andy and Samantha.

Looking forward into 2017 - 18

- Start 5-yearly review of the statutory AONB Management Plan
- If stage one Heritage Lottery Fund application is successful, develop stage two of the big bid
- Practical woodland and archaeological work on Cothelstone Hill
- Further Slow the Flow natural flood management work in the central hills