



Some of the many visitors and stalls at the Country Fair



Children taking part in activities at the Natural England Stall

50 YEARS OF THE SURREY HILLS

Organised by the Surrey Hills Society, the 50th Anniversary Country Fair held at the Dorking Halls a few weeks before Christmas 2008 was a popular day out for people of all ages.

The idea behind the event was to bring together the 2008 celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty with a joint country fair held by the Surrey Hills Society and the Surrey Hills AONB Board. It combined commemorative displays, entertainment, farmers market with local foods and produce, local crafts demonstrations, woodland craft products and information on the Surrey Hills and the day proved to be a great success. Our records show

that at least 1500 people visited it and the stall holders reported excellent sales.

The hall was filled with stalls and people all day and the entertainment included several performances by the Rampant Rooster morris dancers and the Godalming Operatic Society, as well as face painting for children (on the Surrey Wildlife Trust's stand), quilting and other crafts, bug making, toy making and many other activities for people to take part in.

There was information on wood fuel, coppicing and coppice crafts, woodland, landscape and wildlife conservation, the North Downs Way National Trail, the National Trust and Natural England, and a wonderful exhibition of 'Then and Now' photographs comparing the Surrey Hills 50 years ago with today.

All the demonstrations and projects on view were intended to help local people and children get to know more about this special part of Surrey and a bit more about the countryside.

Many visitors took the chance to do some Christmas shopping at the host of stalls around the Great Hall. Many said later that they hoped we would organise another event late in 2009 and this is being considered.

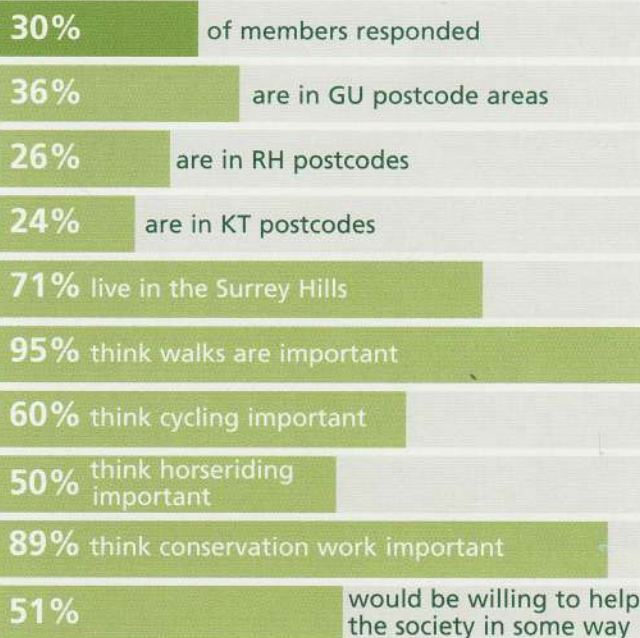
The Dorking Halls event was part of the celebrations marking the half century of the Surrey Hills' designation as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which fell on 8th May 2008. A grant of £41,500 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) helped fund a series of events looking at 50

years of food and farming in the Surrey Hills, culminating in the Anniversary Country Fair.

Surrey Hills Society chairman Neil Maltby says: "Our main aim is to help as wide an audience as possible to understand, appreciate and celebrate the cultural and natural heritage of the Surrey Hills landscape. The Country Fair was a free event, offering everyone the chance to find out more while having a happy time out and being shown many rural products to buy. We feel that the substantial turnout and the busy stalls were a reflection of how much interest there is in the Surrey Hills. The event was widely praised by exhibitors and visitors alike and we met many enthusiastic friends and supporters. It was also an opportunity for local people and especially children to understand how their communities and landscapes have been shaped by farming and food production over many years."

MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

Your views



See more on page 2 for the Chairman's view

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VIEWS

CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE

WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM THE SURREY HILLS?

Late last year the Surrey Hills Society contacted its members. We wanted to find out more about them, their views on the Society, what we should be doing and some other related matters of interest and importance.



Neil Maltby, Chairman

We wanted to know what our members hoped for and wanted from their Society and also what, if anything, they would like to do for the Society. We have been impressed at the response. Nearly a third of the membership replied and the replies came from right across the Surrey Hills, although the greatest number came from GU, RH and KT postcodes.

Seven possible activities of the Surrey Hills Society were listed and respondents were asked to indicate whether they thought these were things that the Society should organise, whether they personally would attend

and lastly whether they would be prepared to help organise some of the activities.

The vast majority, 90% of those who responded, felt that the Society should organise walks, visits, talks/meetings and conservation events with 85% saying they would attend these activities. Encouragingly 15-30% of respondents were prepared to help organise these, as well as social events for the Society. Over 50% also believe the Society should organise cycling and horse riding events.

Asked what else the Society should do, there was a more limited response, though there was a strong feeling that we should not be duplicating the work of other societies, rather we should be co-operating with them. Promoting conservation

and being child friendly were other suggestions received. A substantial proportion of the respondents were happy to do mid week events but Saturdays were preferred and Sundays were the least favoured. There was a slight preference for evening meetings, but over two thirds could attend day time events.

However there was a very strong message from almost 90% of our respondents that they would like to be kept informed of the Society's future plans to review developments affecting the Surrey Hills. This is a clear demonstration of the constant perceived threat to our Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. What 'blew me away', though, was the response to the question – would members like to assist the Society in a number of different and specified ways. Nearly half offered to man Society displays at shows etc and also to help with local publicity. Over a quarter offered to deal with membership enquiries, processing applications and mailing. twelve people offered to deal with bookings for events and four to help develop our website. With this support and enthusiasm we are on the threshold of a dream society.



National Trust warden Mark Russell explains Reigate Fort to members

Neil Maltby, chairman of the Surrey Hills Society

POWER LINES COMING DOWN

As part of the work to care for the appearance of the Surrey Hills a £145,000 project is under way to remove just under a kilometre of high voltage overhead power lines from the landscape at Polesden Lacey, at Great Bookham.

The work, which is being managed by EDF Energy Networks, will see the removal of 10 wooden poles and the only remaining power lines at Polesden Lacey – a 1,400 acre National Trust estate situated on the North Downs in the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The move has been made possible thanks to a special allowance granted by electricity industry regulator Ofgem, and follows a similar project to remove one and three quarter miles of overhead power lines from the landscape at Loseley Park, near Guildford.

Rob Fairbanks, Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Director, said: "Polesden Lacey is one of the most popular National Trust properties in the country and removing the overhead power lines from the estate will enhance some of the finest views in Surrey."

Andrea Selley, Polesden Lacey Property Manager, said:

"We welcome thousands of visitors to Polesden Lacey each year, many of whom take advantage of the wonderful walks found on the wider estate, so we are delighted that this work will really enhance one of the best views of the house."



©SCC Zac Macaulay

Last year the Surrey Hills AONB celebrated its fiftieth anniversary and one of the themes for the year was the importance and the changes in the food and farming sector. Here Wendy Neal-Smith reflects on some of the changes

A VIEW OF FOOD AND FARMING IN SURREY

Surrey is a very special county. It is the most wooded county in England with 28% of wooded area; it has some of the same kind of chalky terrain that you find in the Champagne region of France; and it is home to succulent Aberdeen Angus beef, fresh vegetables, conserves, traditional English ales and award winning sparkling wine.



Local producers: Hogs Back Brewery, Norbury Blue Cheese

It is largely farming which has contributed to make the countryside we know and love today. Throughout the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty we have picturesque scenery criss-crossed with fascinating walks (find out more on www.surreyhills.org.uk or join us for one of our events listed overleaf). One of the advantages of farming in Surrey is the close proximity of 1.2m people, some of whom are some of the most affluent in the country.

Traditionally farmers in Surrey (and indeed throughout the rest of the UK) have been supported by the EU Common Agricultural

Policy (CAP), which paid them on the basis of what they produced. More recently, support is now aimed at broader rural, social, environmental and economic development, so that farmers are paid for looking after the environment, hedgerows, wildlife etc. They are also exploring ways in which they can add value to their produce and diversify.

Last year we were celebrating fifty years of farming and food production in the Surrey Hills, as part of the 50th anniversary of designating the Surrey Hills as an AONB. Many businesses looked back in time, and some may have reflected that the growing of hops was very important to the area in the early part of the 20th century.

In fact, hops used to extend from Alton in Hampshire, through Surrey and into Kent. The land around Farnham was developed as a major hop growing area and Farnham hops

were considered to be the finest quality to be found anywhere in England. Even in the 1950s there were still many acres of hop fields surrounding the town, although now it is only the Hampton Farm Estate in Seale that continues this legacy. Today we have a renaissance of the industry with a number of micro-breweries. Across Surrey you will find the likes of Ascot Ales, Crondall Brewery, The Hogs Back Brewery, The Surrey Hills Brewery, Pilgrim Ales and many others.

But it is possibly Surrey's dairy industry which has seen the most change. Surrey now has very few dairy farms and those that have survived have done so on the basis of being larger and operating more efficiently to bring down costs. Most dairy farms in Surrey sell their milk directly to a large processor, but there are some that are adding value to make their own cheese and ice-cream. Michaela Edge at Norbury Farm near Dorking is one such farmer; she hand-makes her now famous Norbury Blue (a lovely soft creamy blue cheese) and has recently added Dirty Vicar to the range. Caroline Davies at St Joans Farm Dairy is passionate about her rich dairy ice-cream which is made from milk less than 24 hours fresh.

By the 1970s farming in Surrey had emerged into a mixed picture consisting of livestock, dairy farming, grass for livestock, cereals and speciality horticulture. Secretts in Milford have been growers for over 100 years and are now renowned in Surrey, London and the South East for their speciality vegetables and gourmet salads. In June 1999, they hosted the first Farmers' Market in Surrey at Milford. Since this time we have now over a dozen farmers' markets spread across the county.

We have been looking at the changes over the past fifty years, but the future of farming and food in Surrey continues to face a number of challenges. Climate change and food security are just some of the phrases on everyone's lips, and we know that the countryside will change again over the next 50 years.

Wendy Neal-Smith



Cattle grazing on Wisley Common © Surrey Wildlife Trust

A DORMOUSE HAVEN IN SURREY

Despite their laid-back lifestyle, dormice at Juniper Hill, near Reigate, have wasted no time in getting down to business to start their new families! A joint project, run by Surrey Wildlife Trust and the National Trust, has seen a total of 50 dormouse boxes installed at the woodland site, in the hope that providing ready-made homes would help them save their energy for breeding and lead to an increase in their population, after a survey revealed signs that dormice were present in the area.

The boxes were erected last June by members of the 'Limpsfield Task Force', a volunteer group which regularly carries out work with the National Trust at Limpsfield and Reigate. They have since been trained to monitor the boxes and last November found eight dormice using them – one which was bursting at its dove-tail joints, being occupied by a mother with three young!

Dave Williams, Mammals Project Officer at Surrey Wildlife Trust, said: "I was surprised and thrilled that the dormice accepted, and moved into the boxes so quickly. After raising their young over the summer months they would have moved to the ground to hibernate over winter. This is a great success story, but we will have to wait until the summer to see if they return to breed again."

Marc Russell, National Trust Warden for Reigate, said: "I am delighted with our success so far and very grateful to the Limpsfield Task Force for all their support and commitment. The public will be able to learn more about dormice, their habitat and this project during a walk we are organising in August."

Dormouse numbers declined rapidly in England over the last two decades, but projects such as this are helping them to recover. They have recently been designated as a European Protected Species, due to their rarity and vulnerability. There are currently only twelve known sites in Surrey where dormice are found.



Dormouse © SWT V. Latford

WHY THE SURREY HILLS ARE IMPORTANT TO US

Anne Milton MP, Conservative member for Guildford



Anne Milton in Guildford

"There are many wonderful places that may try to rival the Surrey Hills; however as a living, working landscape I think the Surrey Hills are hard to beat. The Hills offer stunning walks and views over what must be one the most beautiful counties in the country and an opportunity for us all to find rest and respite from our busy and hectic lives."

Of course the Hills contain unique and often sensitive habitats and eco-systems that are part of a precarious equilibrium. Moreover, the Hills proximity to London means that there will always be pressure from development, and consequently we must give this

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty the protection it deserves. The Surrey Hills provides hours of enjoyment and, with our help, we will be able to give that same enjoyment for generations to come. My special thanks always to those who give up so much of their time, commitment and energy to ensure that it remains so."

THE VIEW AHEAD

Now that we are reaching our first birthday as a fully fledged Society, it is worth reflecting on how far we have come. It has, in fact, been a remarkable year for us and for our members at the Surrey Hills Society.

In this first year we have already gained well over 300 individual, founder and family memberships representing some 550 people, together with around 35 parish councils and national and local organisations as members. Our charitable status means we are now eligible to apply for a wider range of grants and funds. So we think it is

now time to push forward with some worthwhile projects across our area of outstanding natural beauty. One possibility is creating unique audio and audio history guided walks in conjunction with parishes for the benefit of our members, parishioners and others. We are also contemplating an ambitious project to face up to the Mountain Bike Question, the conflicts that can occur between bikers, pedestrians and horse riders. And there are other good ideas we are working on.

We are also expanding our existing programme of events, guided walks, visits to places that are not normally open to the public, seminars and talks on a wide and diverse array of subjects connected with the Surrey Hills for our membership to participate in.

Our purpose, to enhance and protect the Surrey Hills AONB for those who visit, live and work in the Surrey Hills has obviously struck a chord with many people. To help us with this, we appreciate there are members offering to help run our new Society, organise events, work with us on projects and help us source and raise funds so as to deliver our aims and objectives. If you can spare anything, from an hour to a few days a month, please contact the Society on info@surreyhillsociety.org or on 01372 220647.



Box Hill view © Natural England/Anna Katrin-Purkiss



Members on last summer's Limpsfield visit with National Trust Ranger Mark Richards



Members on last summer's Lovelace Bridges visit

EVENTS

A wide variety of events are on offer for Society members. Book early to avoid disappointment

SUNDAY 5TH APRIL

A walk and guided tour at Reigate Fort

Meeting at Wray Lane Car Park, see how the Fort was designed to defend London at the end of the nineteenth century. Entry is free to members. Contact Mark Richards at the National Trust on 01342 843225

WEDNESDAY 29TH APRIL

Chairman's Day – A day on Leith Hill

Start at Home Farm, Coldharbour Lane, and see the farm and the Tower with lunch at the Parrot, Forest Green. Contact Deborah Mason on 01306 713063 or neilmaltby@aol.com for booking and further details.

SUNDAY 17TH MAY

Rhododendron Wood at Leith Hill

Meeting at Wood Car Park, Tanhurst Lane, explore the rare rhododendrons and beautifully scented azaleas, finishing with tea and cake. Free to members. Contact us on 01372 220647 at info@surreyhillsociety.org

SATURDAY 13TH JUNE

Surrey Hills Society AGM

Full details to follow but following the AGM at Warren Farm Barns, Mickleham, there will be a walk up to Headley Common. Contact us at info@surreyhillsociety.org or on 01372 220647

THURSDAY 18TH JUNE

Enjoying the Mole Gap Trail

Starting at Dorking Station, Lower Mole Countryside Management will show you market towns and England's largest vineyard, with a pub lunch. Booking essential. Contact Louise Wilford at louise.wilford@surreycc.gov.uk or on 01372 743783

FRIDAY 17TH JULY

See Shere Village and Museum

An evening guided walk around Shere, finishing at Shere Museum. Booking essential (£2 donation suggested for the Museum) on 01372 220647 or by email at info@surreyhillsociety.org

WEDNESDAY 12TH AUGUST

Walking tour at Hindhead Tunnel site

See heathland management and visit the A3 tunnel site. Numbers are very restricted. Booking essential on 01372 220647 or by email at info@surreyhillsociety.org

FRIDAY 9TH OCTOBER

War and Peace in the Surrey Hills

At East Horsley Keith Grieves will take you to 19th and 20th century Surrey, including the impact of the motorist. Booking essential on 01372 220647 or by email at info@surreyhillsociety.org

VARIOUS DATES

Join Mid-Surrey Ramblers

Mid-Surrey Ramblers are offering Society members the opportunity to join some of their walks. See our website for more details.

Join in as we celebrate all that is special about the Surrey Hills.

For more information on the Society's events visit our website www.surreyhillsociety.org or call 01372 220647