



We all know that Himalayan balsam is a pernicious weed which out-competes our already hard-pressed native flora and, when it dies back, leads to erosion of riverbanks. Already it's spreading away from the watercourses into gardens. DEFRA have classed it as an INNS (invasive non-native species) and want it controlled.

Last year the RFS had about 40 people pulling balsam and good progress was made. This year we were determined to build on that by arranging over a dozen pulls, at different times of the day and week so that as many people as possible could attend. Instead, we got 28 people (and thank-you to them); only 12% of our membership.

The IDB have mown the vegetation in the flat areas near the river. They cannot, though, mow sloping banks, drainage ditches, or among trees. Those of our members who turned out have used trimmers here to great effect. Others have used slashers; others their hands. Still others have got into the river in waders and cleared the banks from below. They have made a heroic effort, some turning out time after time for nearly two months. Because of this large areas have been cleared at Strensall, Haxby and from Huntington down to Yearsley Baths. But large areas remain to be done. How much more we could have done with even twice the number of volunteers!



We know that many of our members are physically unable to do this work, and no-one expects them to. But many more are able-bodied. What then is the problem?

The RFS is not alone; other organisations are battling balsam throughout the country. I volunteer for the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, whose reserves are kept clear of balsam by gangs of volunteers

pulling and strimming every year until it diminishes and even vanishes. It just takes determination and numbers.

We assume that our members join the RFS because they want to do what they can for the Foss, or for the environment as a whole. Is it, then, that they see the seemingly endless seas of balsam and think trying to fight it is a waste of time? Perhaps they don't want to get backache and scratches and nettle stings? Who could blame them? The fact remains that if we don't do it, who will?

We will have another go at the balsam next year – or will we? Perhaps the weary balsam pullers should call it a day, admit that most of our members are not interested and just wait for someone to spray it with glyphosate, killing all other vegetation in the process. Or we could turn out in numbers and encourage the public to help us. What do you think? Let us know.

Alison Scott



On Saturday 20th of July, eight members turned up at the Foss Islands footbridge for the litter pick, the numbers being lower than normal perhaps due to the pos-

Getting picky

sibility of inclement weather. We did not use the CYC boat on the day due to the lack of litter to be found in the water.

Instead, we concentrated on clearing the river banks downstream to Blue Bridge. This was a successful litter pick, and we collected some 10 full bin bags of waste, seen in the photograph taken at Castle Mills Lock.

It was also apparent on looking around the Nature Reserve on the other side of the footbridge that there was no significant evidence of litter, merely chest high vegetation.

My grateful thanks go to those who took part. The next scheduled litter pick will be at 9.15 on Saturday 19th October.

Barry Thomas



As a busy year ends ...

OCTOBER

Sat 19 October 9.15 Footbridge opposite Morrisons. Litter pick along the Foss. Contact: Barry Thomas if you are coming and for information re car parking

Fri 25 Oct 10.00 Dutch House. Walk Dutch House via Pond Head circular walk 5.5 miles. Refreshments therein afterwards as required. Contact: Bob Jowett

DECEMBER

Sun 1 Dec. 11.00 Novotel. Christmas lunch and a talk by Colin Atkinson on "The Changing Face of the York Riverside". Booking opens at the October meeting. Contact: Mike Gray

CONTACTS

Mike Gray 01904 758510

sdmike.05@gmail.com (preferred)

Bob Jowett 01904 764702

bob.jowett1@btoenworld.com

Barry Thomas 01904 90081

barry1thomas@googlemail.com

What do YOU want?

The society has put forward a varied programme of walks, talks, activities and visits over the last many years in the hope of providing something for everyone. Some have had direct relevance to the river and our activities, whilst others certainly have not, but have still attracted a lot of support.

It's been noticeable over recent months that the number of members joining in with some, though certainly not all, of these events, has fallen to levels at which cancellations have been forced upon us, and it has been rather embarrassing turning up to some visits with only two or three members.

Even the walks, which have been central to our programme for many a year, have not all been attracting the numbers they used to.

To avoid this happening next year it seems sensible to ask you, our members, what events you would wish to take part in.

Some members join as a way of helping the good cause of looking after the river, and to these members we say thank you. Others, we know, are no longer fit enough to join in many of our activities. That is our demographic and won't change. However, what does everyone else think we should be providing?

We'd like to hear from you, please. What events would you turn up for? We have ideas, but if they are not what you want to do, there is little point in us arranging them. The more specific you can be, the better; if there's something you would like to do, let us know.

Please help us build next year's programme by emailing us your suggestions on info@riverfossociety.co.uk or writing to:

The RFS, c/o 22 Drakes Close, York YO32 9GN

Our readers can see the winners of this year's photo competition in the Winter 2019-20 issue



Leading the way

The rickety old footbridge over Primrose Dike, Strensall has been replaced by a new bridge funded and installed by the developers of the Tannery site. This new bridge serves the Foss Walk, The Centenary Way and the Ebor Way long distance footpaths. Our thanks go The City of York Public Rights of Way Office for pursuing the installation of this new bridge.

John Millett

Defending the Walls

The RFS was invited to run a stand on Foss Islands Road, beside the river, as part of the York Walls Festival, with three aims: to explain to visitors why there is a gap in the city walls, to tell them about the history of the Foss, and to show them what we do, which hopefully would attract some new members. The first two we certainly managed; only time will tell how well we succeeded in the last!

We told our stories via interpretation boards mounted on the railings along Foss Islands Road, and by displays inside the gazebo, all of which attracted much attention. You may have already seen the interpretation boards on display at one of our other events.

As anyone who ventured into town on 10 – 11 August might remember, the weather was not on our side. Wind and rain – not ideal conditions in which to display posters and leaflets in a gazebo. With two of us hanging on, we managed to put it up and tie it to the railings along the Foss. If the gazebo was going into the river, then so were the railings. It survived, despite a few worrying moments in the 35mph gusts, and so did we. The odd burst of heavy rain merely added to the fun – at least we had the full attention of the visitors who took shelter with us. Sunday was a lot calmer, thank goodness, though surprisingly we had fewer visitors.

This was the second edition of the Festival, run by the Friends of York Walls, and it had expanded significantly, helped by a Lottery grant. Maps and activity books for children were handed out and visitors were encour-



John explains water sampling

aged to walk the circuit of the walls, with us acting as a conduit between Layerthorpe and the Red Tower, which was the site of several activities; including an afternoon BBQ on the Saturday.

We had around 250 visitors to our gazebo over the two days and talked to people from the US, New Zealand and Germany, as well as others from all over the UK. There was a real interest both in the reasons for the gap in the walls and our activities as a society – it's strange though how visitors seem to come in waves. One minute you are twiddling your thumbs and wondering what's for supper, and the next you have half a dozen people around you asking questions.

The RFS team comprised ten members who all enjoyed themselves – the day seemed to flash by. The Festival is due to run again next year and the RFS will be part of it, though hoping to spend less time hanging onto the gazebo.

Mike Gray



A beautiful day ...

Six members met for a walk on 7 August - a bright sunny day with a warm breeze. We met at Coxwold, then drove to Yearsley village and parked at the crossroads. Our route to Coxwold took us past Rutter's Plantation where we stopped off at the spring reputed to be the origin of the river Foss, but very little water was flowing.

August walking

We then headed to High Lions Lodge, and made our way across meadows which presented us with superb views of Ampleforth College.

At Low Lions Farm the footpath was barred so access was achieved by climbing over a locked steel gate. We made our way down the track making good progress along Colley Broach Road, crossing the dismantled railway track and stopping for a break at Acorn Hill.

We arrived at Coxwold village just after midday. Here we ended the walk with four members of the party enjoying a very nice lunch amongst the floral splendour of Coxwold Tea Rooms' garden.

John Millett

Don't forget our website:

www.riverfossociety.co.uk

Walking the entire Foss

The RFS arranges an annual Foss Walk so that the entire route can be covered over two consecutive days. This ensures that we have full knowledge of the state of the paths

We walked to Oulston Reservoir and had our lunch by the dam, after which our route took us past Pond Head Farm, where we noted that the signposts are incorrectly labelled 'Foss Way', not 'Foss Walk'.



Starting at the Blue Bridge

and are aware of any obstacles; the signing and waymarking is also checked.

The weather was simply too hot for walking, with little shade. We all carried lots of water, sunhats and suncream.

Five walkers started at Blue Bridge at 11 am on Friday 28th June; two more joined us further north. We followed the Foss to Strensall, where we stopped at the Ship Inn for drinks before leaving via the east bank to avoid a property with very intimidating guard dogs. We walked north on the riverside path and then through the new housing estate (not shown on the OS map) – where we couldn't find our way out and walked in circles before eventually escaping!

After crossing bridges over Black Dyke and the Foss, we went north on Lilling Low Lane through West Lilling to Sheriff Hutton, following Mark Jones' 'blue route'. At Cornborough Manor we found fields with no path, so had to follow the Right of Way. After Black Collar Farm we arrived at the Blacksmith's Arms in Farlington where four of us finished the day with a good meal. We were made very welcome by the landlord, despite being almost an hour late!

Next day we headed north from the Blacksmith's Arms through arable fields before reaching the Farlington to Stillington road - a bad section of road walking as there are no footpaths. We turned into Harryfield Lane, an overgrown unclassified road, before passing the site of Marton Abbey and crossing the Stillington to Brandsby road. Two new Foss Walk signposts were noted by the roadside. The route took us towards Crayke, then right to the Dutch House, where we were made very welcome for refreshments.

We headed east along the road before turning towards Oulston where we stopped for more drinks on the village green. We then picked up the path at a stile, so overgrown it was difficult to see. The path along the Kyle Beck was totally overgrown, making walking very slow and difficult. We followed tractor tracks through crops along the beck, then a small lane past a fishing lake and along a road, joining the Foss Walk path into the market place in Easingwold – the official end of the walk. Driving back to Farlington, we celebrated our accomplishment with

another good meal at the Blacksmith's.

This year there were fewer walkers and only Anne, Philip and Bob completed both days. We found a few difficult stiles, some wobbly and others with bits missing. The worst had a top consisting of a round log with a bees' nest in it! Fortunately no-one got stung. A dog accompanied us on the second day and managed

well, but many stiles are not dog friendly.

The ground was very solid and hard on the feet for most of the route. We averaged just over 3 mph the first day and just under on the second.

The paths were dry, grass and crops having grown very high in places. Much of the walk was also overgrown, making the paths difficult to find. Some fields had paths which were very hard to follow; in others the grass had been cut and left on the ground, making walking difficult. The walk is very short of signing and waymarking.

This was my first RFS walk as an 80-year-old. As an experienced walker with no history of blisters or injuries, I had a blister, suffered toenail problems, and an ankle injury was still swollen after a week.

The 2020 Foss Walk will be on Friday 26th and Saturday 27th June.

Bob Jowett



Where's the footpath?



Across the beck

Did you know that the River Foss Society is on Facebook too?

Our walking enthusiast Anne Bednarski has been running shorter 'strolls' for those who do not fancy the longer distances. Here are two of the pleasant summer walks ...

On 3 July, eight of us walked along the Foss from Huntington Church to Haxby on a lovely sunny morning. We passed under the bridge by the A1237 ring road where Peter also joined us. After crossing the Earswick Bridge we took a few minutes to look at the impressive RFS information board.

As we passed back to the west side of the Foss by Lock Cottage we were sorry to see so much rubbish in the river. On a more positive note, there was much evidence of the effective balsam pull carried out by members of the Society earlier on in the year. The usual muddy path before Landing Lane has now been replaced by a firm pebbled path - much better. This was built by The Conservation Volunteers after a request from CYC

On reaching Haxby Village we stopped for a drink at the Aroma Cafe where most of us enjoyed sitting outside in the sunshine. Those returning to Huntington did so on foot or by bus.



Walking on 3rd July



A large group on 17th July

On the pleasant evening of 17 July 13 RFS members set off on a stroll from the Highwayman pub in Sheriff Hutton.

We walked past the castle, once a Yorkshire stronghold for the powerful Neville family, but now

in private hands. After passing through the churchyard we noted the site of the original motte and bailey fortification built by Bertram de Bulmer, Sheriff of York in the 12th century.

Walking southwards through the fields we stopped at the lake of Sheriff Hutton Hall - hidden behind trees and very easy to miss. Then north, back to the village and the pub where we enjoyed a hearty meal.

Anne Bednarski

An evening search

We were a group of four – two members and two guests – and met with Will Durrant of Community Action for Nature (CAN) and colleague Peter at Lock Cottage, New Earswick on the evening of 23 August to search for bats. CAN have installed many bat boxes in the area and has invested in hand-held bat detectors which indicate by bleeps when bats are about. We walked along the Foss footpath behind the village, and using the detectors, searched for bats. Each type of bat has a unique frequency. Some mobile phones have an attachment that connects to the detectors and identifies the species. The detectors worked a treat, and we were amazed at the number that were about so early that evening. We had

both common and soprano pipistrelles flying around us catching the insects. It was just amazing to be surrounded by them chasing insects above our heads in the twilight. Just think, they weigh as much as a 20p piece and can eat 3,000 insects in a night, and as long as they eat the nasty bitey ones I'm happy.

The evening was wonderful – lots of bats as well as being led by the knowledgeable Will and Peter. I cannot thank them enough! I have been on a number of bat walks with them before, and every one has been different. You never know what else is going to show up as last year we had a water vole! Looking forward to the next one already.

Elaine Mepham



A Pipistrelle friend as seen on Wikipedia



Welcome to August

The extra growth is all quite pretty until it covers everything – there are stretches where you can't even see any water now. There's not much that can be done about it until we get some proper rain; there just isn't enough water.

We celebrated 1 August – a lovely sunny evening - with a half dozen or so of us setting forth from Huntington All Saints in the general direction of York. It was a gentle and sociable stroll along a river already partially blocked in places by Burr Reeds and Flag Irises, the consequence of which was a build-up of duckweed that was soon to become much worse.

The high level of nitrogen in the river, from agricultural run-off and a series of sewage treatment plants along its course, meant that eutrophication is causing excess growth of all sorts of plants, and hence the blockages. The IDB had been out spraying the reeds with glyphosate in places too – I'm not sure why, as in normal circumstances the first serious rains would push them out of the way.

I fear climate change is going to make this green flush a permanent feature of our increasingly eccentric summers. What it might do to the oxygen levels in the very depleted river I'm not sure, but there were, and still are, hundreds of fish visible from tiddlers to a foot plus.

Alas, there was also a continual band of flowering balsam all the way from Huntington Road to Monk Gate – we just haven't had enough volunteers this year to clear it and have had to concentrate our efforts upstream.

Nevertheless, it was a near idyllic stroll in many places – overhanging nettles apart – and we are privileged to have such a green alley leading into the city. Let's face it, that's one of the reasons many of us joined the society!

A visit to the Eagle & Child in High Petergate rounded off the evening very pleasantly.

Mike Gray

The Selby Horseshoe Walk

On Thursday 5 September eight walkers and a dog met at Brayton Bridge car park on the Selby Canal. The Selby Horseshoe Walk officially starts at Selby Abbey, but we chose to start at the car park. In bright, warm and sunny weather we followed the walk clockwise alongside the canal, heading to Brayton Barff, a small wood, where we stopped for a snack.

We then walked down to Barff Lane and crossed to join the right of way to Thorpe Willoughby. Unfortunately, we missed the 'path closed' sign but a lady explained that it had been closed for two years.

Having found our way through an estate we followed Leeds Road to the Fox, where we bought refreshments. Having enjoyed this pleasant pub, we headed to Dam Lane and then turned onto a footpath, walking almost due east. The walk took us past Cross Hills Farm and then eastwards into Selby. After passing the Abbey, we headed back to the Selby Canal and our cars.

Bob Jowett



A conversation on the path

On the Foss

Editor: Beth Shurter Tel. 01904 631125
email: york.beth2@gmail.com

Secretary: Alison Scott Tel. 01904 766206
email: alisonscott3029@hotmail.com

Membership: Elaine Mepham
Tel. 01904 769168

email: membership@riverfossociety.co.uk