



On Saturday 17 October, the River Foss Society carried out its last litter pick of the year. Prior to the event, I carried out a survey of the river and river banks from Monk Bridge downstream to Blue Bridge and its junction with the River Ouse. What was immediately apparent was the significant reduction in the amount of visible litter compared to previous litter picks. This I concluded was due to two factors. There was a City of York Council organized litter pick throughout York, spread over two weeks the previous month, which clearly had been a great success. Secondly was the dramatic reduction in visitors to the City due to the Coronavirus – I have never seen such a low number of cars parked in the Castle car park.

With access to the boat/pontoon and its skipper, courtesy of the CYC, we had a very successful morning. On

## Clean and tidy



the boat we filled three large builders' bags, and items recovered from the river included a bicycle and a very large traffic bollard, which had to be drained of water before lifting it onto the boat.

Those walking along the river banks collected some 15 bin liners of rubbish. The pictures show the boat operating upstream of the Castle Mills lock and the team retrieving litter from behind railings on Castle Mills Bridge.

At the end of the litter picking session, we loaded everything collected onto the boat/pontoon, which returned to its mooring point along Foss Islands Road. The rubbish was

then transferred onto the back of a CYC lorry. My sincere thanks go to all those members present on the day and to the CYC boat skipper, Mark.

*Barry Thomas*

After almost 12 months of discussion between the City of York Council, which is the lower River Foss Navigation Authority, and the Inland Waterways Association (IWA), with the River Foss Society being an interested party, an agreed Memorandum of Understanding has

## Open the Lock!

almost been concluded so that trained volunteers can operate the Lock (agreement not taking quite as long as Brexit).

Volunteers have been operating the Lock since 2007 through a verbal understanding between the CYC and the now dormant North Riding Branch of the IWA.

Last year the River Foss Navigation up to Wormalds Cut was added to the IWA's Silver Propeller Challenge for boats, canoes or paddle boards to reach 20 places from a list of over 50 at the extremes of the inland waterways system. In 2020 the first boat to achieve the challenge wanted to add the Foss to its list but had to be refused passage due to work on Blue Bridge and the Foss Barrier. Late in 2020 there was a further six week



*The unused lock covered in summer duckweed*

closure when work continued on the Barrier.

We hope that more boats will want to include the Foss and pass through Castle Mills Lock to meet the Challenge, and that suitable lock volunteers will be available in 2021.

*Peter Hopwood*

Recently, our Treasurer Michael Reakes was approached by freelance journalist Sarah Freeman, who was writing an article for the Yorkshire Post about the 2015 floods in York and wanted first hand stories of those who were affected by them. Sarah and Michael have agreed to share some of Michael's memories of that time...

Michael and his wife Serena had only just retired to York. Wanting a home with a good view, they chose their 'dream' house on Huntington Road overlooking the Foss as 'it would be safer. We had looked carefully at the history of flooding risk but thought that the risk was acceptable as it had never flooded since the Foss Barrier was installed.' Having registered with the Environment Agency (EA), they also listed the items to have ready just in case. 'Just in case, we registered our email, landline phone and mobile phone numbers with the Environment Agency.' Michael added a pair

## And the waters rose ...

area for people to rescue. 'Did we want to be rescued? The answer was a resounding "yes", as conditions were deteriorating and we could stay with our daughter in Easingwold until the floods subsided.'

After checking the submerged path with sticks, the rescuers brought the boat near the house and carried Michael and Serena out fireman style over their shoulders. They were taken to higher ground and offered temporary accommodation. Instead, they could reach

their car so headed for Easingwold. 'We are so grateful to the teams of rescuers

from Upper Wharfedale Fell Rescue Association and Scarborough and Ryedale Mountain Rescue, who rescued us that day. BBC Radio York kept us informed throughout; we value our local radio stations in emergencies such as this.'

Once the flood water had dropped, they returned, not knowing if the water had got into the house. It had not, so the only clean up involved throwing a few things out of the garage, and power washing the garage, garden paths and walls. The City of York Council was very quick at cleaning the mud and muck off the roads and pavements. They also provided skips for anything damaged by the water.

'We were very lucky: houses along Huntington Road needed about 6 months of drying out and repairs,' Michael says. 'We thank the planning officers who approved the planning permission for our estate, which was built around 2010. Most of the properties have a concrete



Michael and Serena were taken to safety

of pink Wellington Boots as an extra Christmas present for Serena!

After returning to York on Christmas day through heavy rain, they received the EA Flood Warning [Flooding is expected, take immediate action] and watched the water rise on Boxing Day. Having moved the car to higher ground, they spent the day moving things into the garage and house. A Severe Flood Alert [Severe flooding, danger to life, consider evacuation] was then issued. Hearing the rumour that the Foss Barrier would be lifted, they retreated upstairs and packed backpacks.

They slept little that night as the waters rose. The gas boiler shut down as the flooding caused fluctuations in gas pressure. 'At first light we saw that our entire front garden was underwater, and the water was within 6 inches of the front door. The water in our garden and garage was between 0.5 and 0.75 cm deep, and nearly five feet deep at the deepest point at the bottom of our drive. At the back, the Foss was a raging torrent, more like the Mississippi.' They then saw a group of men in waterproof suits with a boat who were checking the



Rescuers at the edge of the submerged Huntington Road

floor built up at the height of the Foss Barrier, so although the water surrounded us in our gardens and garages, it did not enter our houses.'

'Although we had no damage, and made no claims on our insurance, we have found it hard to maintain flood insurance; we are not eligible for Flood Re <https://www.floodre.co.uk/> because of the date our house was built, so we now pay a much higher premium and have a £5000 deductible for any flood damage'. As Michael says 'All in all, this is a small price to pay'.

*John Millett tells us about the early days ...*

## Our Foss Walk

*Bob Jowett, Walks leader, carries on the story...*

In 1973 Bill Sessions, the Chair of The Foss Amenity Society, as the River Foss Society was called, set up meetings with Flaxton Rural District Council and North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC), to discuss a possible route for the Foss Walk. From these meetings, the NYCC Footpaths Officer suggested a possible route using public rights of way linking up with existing local footpaths to produce a Foss Walk. The walk would go from York to the source of the Foss near Pond Head, up to Coxwold, and finishing at Easingwold.

The Footpaths Officer was enthusiastic but as a North Yorkshire civil servant, with no committee mandate, he could not put it forward, but was happy for the Society to promote it without reference to him. From that time enthusiastic members, including Bill Sessions, Peter Walls, John Carr and the energetic Michael Fife led groups to establish the walk.

In 1975 the Foss Walk was launched with about one hundred folks walking from Halley's Terrace to New Earswick. This was led by Lord Mayor Jack Birch and Sheriff Gerald Dean, accompanied by their ladies. Among those supporting were committee members and Major Blashford-Snell, recently returned from exploring the Congo in West Africa.

A route-planning sub-committee plotted a large scale coloured marked route. An A4 pamphlet detailing the walk was produced, followed in 1988 by the first edition of the superbly illustrated Foss Walk booklet by Mark W. Jones, later Society President. Both the pamphlet and the Foss Walk booklet are now out of print.

In later years Pat Rattenbury became walks leader, and a speedy one at that! He continued waymarking the route, painting many of the upright stile posts white, easily identified at a distance. These can still be seen in places today.

Walking both the Foss Walk and various sections of it many times over the years, I noticed that many way-

markers were missing, damaged or had never been erected. I approached both City of York and North Yorkshire County Councils, but nothing came to fruition.

Eventually, the Committee approached the councils again. This time, NYCC responded and agreed to supply the waymarkers. Their representative met with us and offered lots of good advice, plus their map showing the Rights of Way on

footpaths and bridle paths, to ensure correct marking. With the waymarkers at hand, we produced Foss Walk stickers to add to their centres. Volunteer teams were formed, and we planned carefully so as to use the correct marker in each position. We were told not to attach markers to trees or telegraph poles.

We started on 12 October just outside Strensall, and my team comprised Bill Twist, John Millett and Michael Alexander. We walked south to Strensall and the NYCC border. Our first challenge arose just over the iron bridge where it crosses the Foss. We couldn't attach a waymarker to it, so a signpost will be requested from NYCC.

After reaching Strensall we

walked back northwards, checking markers as we went. The second session was on 22 October, starting from the Blacksmith's Arms Farlington. The team for the day was John Millett, Bill Twist and me. We headed south towards Foss House, putting up 23 waymarkers, some for the footpath, and some for bridle paths. We then walked back to Farlington, checking the waymarkers for visibility, and to see if any obvious positions had been missed.

Our planned third session was cancelled due to lockdown 2. Now that we are in lockdown 3 and in winter, we will have to wait until Spring brings better weather and, we hope, more freedom of movement.



*Opening the walk in 1975. From left: Lord Mayor Jack Birch, Bill Sessions, Mrs Birch, Sheriff Gerald Dean, Mrs Dean, Major Blashford-Snell. A sizeable crowd including committee members and police follows!*



*Waymarking, October 2020. Bill Twist, Michael Alexander and John Millett at work.*



*Bill Twist and John Millett show a new waymarker.*

I'm sure you've seen and heard quite a bit recently about otters and mink, regarding Covid in farmed mink, but also over many months concerning the effect each of them has on the environment.

We have both of these mammals along the Foss from time to time, and have had quite a few reports, as well as photos and videos, confirming their presence. We

## Four legged friends – and enemies



*A water vole photographed on the Foss at New Earswick*

are particularly concerned about the presence of mink, though. They are non-native invasive predators and are voracious hunters with a particular appetite for water voles; it is the lack of recent sightings of these rare native rodents that concerns us. (Think Ratty in Wind in the

Willows). We know they were around a couple of years ago, as we went looking for them and found traces in quite a few places. Since then though, we've had no further reports and our vole rafts - used as latrines - remained pristine (until the IDB mowed them).

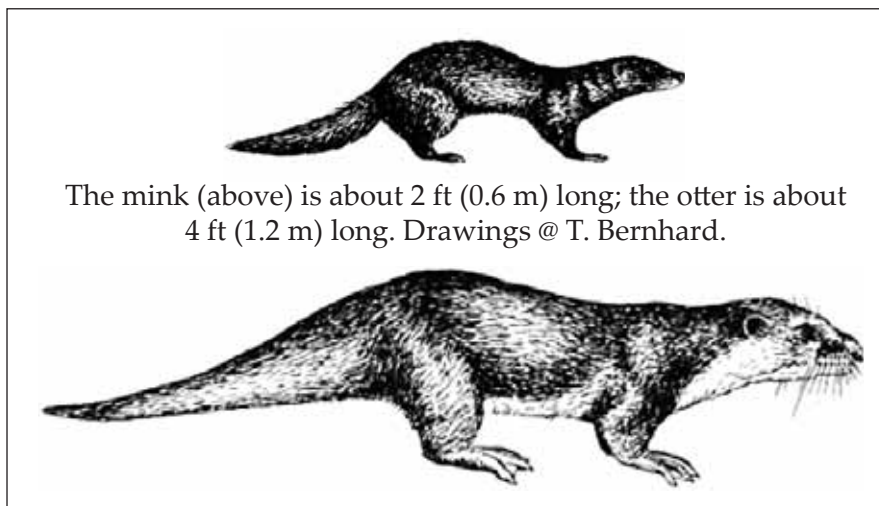
This is where you could help us, please. We need more information to enable us to assess the true situation. We'd like to hear all and any reports of the presence of either mammal



*A vole search underway by RFS member Christine Gray (foreground) assisted by Emma Sutton and Gemma Brown from St Nicks (back)*

(plus any water voles!), and if photos are possible, then so much the better. We will log all the reports we get over the first six months of 2021 and then publish our findings. So, if you see anything, please let the RFS know, via email, [info@riverfossociety.co.uk](mailto:info@riverfossociety.co.uk) or our Facebook page [@riverfossociety](https://www.facebook.com/riverfossociety).

To help you work out which is which ... Otters are a protected native species and present little threat to



The mink (above) is about 2 ft (0.6 m) long; the otter is about 4 ft (1.2 m) long. Drawings @ T. Bernhard.

water voles. They can be up to twice as big as mink, and tend to be nocturnal. Mink are more likely to be active during the day. Otters are also less likely to be seen in family groups and have a distinctive chocolate brown colouring with a clearly visible creamy colour chin/chest

patch. Mink are generally a blacker brown and more obviously furry.

*Mike Gray*

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

### On the Foss

Editor: Beth Shurter Tel. 01904 631125  
email: [york.beth2@gmail.com](mailto:york.beth2@gmail.com)

Secretary: Alison Scott Tel. 01904 766206  
email: [alisonscott3029@hotmail.com](mailto:alisonscott3029@hotmail.com)

Membership: Elaine Mepham  
Tel. 01904 769168

email: [membership@riverfossociety.co.uk](mailto:membership@riverfossociety.co.uk)