



On the Foss

**Autumn
2021**

News from The River Foss Society

As part of our presence on Foss Islands Road during the York Walls Festival, we were thrilled to see a boat navigating the River Foss. This was the first boat since 2018 to use the Castle Mills Lock.

Volunteers have been trained to operate the lock since 2004. An informal agreement between the Inland Waterways Association (IWA) and the City of York Council (CYC) became a more official one and this worked well for some time. Unfortunately, what was then the IWA North Riding Branch became dormant and use of the lock had to stop.

A formal understanding between IWA and CYC has finally been agreed and after another pause due to work on the Blue Bridge and the River Foss Barrier, volunteers including new recruits, have been trained or re-trained during early August 2021. The training

OPEN FOR BUSINESS!



Slipstream heads into the lock.



Slipstream – first visitor to the Foss since 2018.

took place just in time for the York Walls Festival.

As part of our activities, the first use of the lock on 15 August was by 'Slipstream', a former Norfolk crab boat, now owned by an RFS member. This 16 foot boat is typical to the Norfolk coast and was bought from its builder, a Norfolk boat yard, 52 years ago by our member's father. A small diesel engine has replaced a gaff rig and it is now kept on the River Ouse near York.

We hope 'Slipstream' is the first of many visitors. The River Foss is now part of the IWA Silver Propeller Challenge, where those accepting try to visit as many of the nation's under-used waterways by boat or canoe as possible. And there is the chance of receiving the IWA's Silver Propeller Challenge Plaque! Visiting craft will be very welcome on the River Foss.



You can now find us on Twitter @riverfossyork. There are some recent videos from York Mix and BBC Radio York interviewing Tim, Mike and John about "keeping the river clean."

And, of course, we're still on Facebook



2021 Final Litter Pick

This year's last litter pick will happen on Saturday 16 October. Meet on Foss Islands Road (by the 'half moon' bridge) at 9.00 am. Remember – you must contact Barry Thomas so that he can plan the morning's work. Contact: Barry Thomas 01904 490081, or on email barry1thomas@googlemail.com

You may have seen in the local news that the Environment Agency (EA) had four pumps running along the Foss on Foss Islands Road for the several days in late August and wondered why.

First Aid for the Foss



Roger Button photographed the pumps working through the night.

Yorkshire Water reported the presence of both dead fish and others struggling to breathe on the surface around Foss Islands Road, as well as in several other places. The cause was found to be low levels of dis-

solved oxygen in the water, most likely due to the carpet of duckweed. This is a natural phenomenon due to low flow rates and warm overcast weather reinforced by high nitrogen levels, which are not natural. Sunshine would help the situation as photosynthesis can take place, increasing the oxygen levels, but the sun has been with us only sporadically at the moment.

The EA were running the pumps to increase the dissolved oxygen levels, with a five-fold improvement achieved, to a level at which fish are able resume their normal activities. They continued pumping for as long as was needed, and with no rain on the horizon to increase the flow of water, this lasted for some while. It will undoubtedly return next year.

The burst sewage main releasing untreated waste into the river around West Nooks, Haxby, can only have contributed to this, and dead fish have been reported from there downwards. How long stocks will take to recover remains to be seen, but they have been seriously depleted. Any reports from fisherfolk will be welcome to help us monitor the recovery.

Many thanks to everyone who reported issues to us. The EA is to be commended for their rapid response to what could have become a very serious issue.

Mike Gray

On Saturday 17 July we had our second litter pick of the year, when 11 members gathered at our start point on Foss Islands Road. Three people were allocated to litter pick off the CYC (City of York Council) boat/pontoon, and the others were directed downstream with particular emphasis on covering all the areas where there was excessive litter – identified by me doing a reconnaissance three days earlier.



The boat goes under the footbridge

We all met up some two hours later at Castle Mills Lock, where the photograph was taken. After

Rich Pickings

placing all the litter collected onto the boat/pontoon, we returned to the start point and off-loaded it onto a waiting CYC vehicle for disposal.

It was a very successful morning, and I would like to thank all those who participated. The next litter pick will take place on Saturday, 16 October. We will meet on Foss Islands Road at 9.00 am.

Barry Thomas



Another successful picking session

York Walls Festival



We got a lot of attention with this display of some of the many trolleys – numbers 36 and 37 – pulled from the river



Andy set up an interesting table with sample trays of River Foss water and some of the many species living in it. Kids enjoyed investigating these with magnifiers.

After missing last year, the York Walls Festival was enthusiastic to once again celebrate the most complete circuit of city walls in England. The River Foss formed a natural part of the barrier when the walls were built and the River Foss Society has now taken part for three years.

At our stall, on Saturday and Sunday 14 & 15 August, we showed not only the history of the river but also displayed some of our current activities like litter picking, water sampling and nature observation. Along the fence, several panels told about the river's history



This panel on the fence explains how the Foss formed part of the city's defences

Our litter picking crew on the Council boat were photographed from the footpath above



Among the Foss residents swimming in the trays were snails, leeches, water boatmen, worms and fly larvae

Regular paddleboarders Tim and Jane stopped by



Lots of photos of past times on the River Foss

Don't forget our website:

www.riverfossociety.co.uk

Summer



We walked down a shady lane along a minor road close to the Agricultural College, eventually turning right at the start of the village of Bilbrough. Here at the highest point of the walk we could see the top of nearby Askham Richard prison, (the 'Richard' is reputed to be Richard, 1st Earl of Cornwall). We could also see York Minster and further on towards the Cleveland Hills.

Our evening walk of 15 July was a busy one, with 14 walkers and 2 dogs. The group visited two villages, Askham Richard and Askham Bryan, and skirted a third, Bilbrough. All three villages are mentioned in the Domesday Book.

We started off from Askham Bryan, the name of which comes from *ascam* or *ascha* meaning 'enclosure of the ash tree'. 'Bryan' refers to Bryan Fitzalan whose family held the Manor in the 12th century. It is next to Askham Richard.



Stopping for a break

We strolled through several fields along another minor road to Askham Richard, stopping for a photo under a willow by the village pond. A footpath then took us alongside the Old Joiners Cottage, across some more fields and back to The Nag's Head for a drink and a meal.

It was a beautiful evening with a cloudless sky and lovely views and the walk was enjoyed by all!

Anne Bednarski

A small group of walkers gathered on the evening of 21 July at the Village Hall in Nunnington, for our latest expedition, a circular walk of around four and a half miles. Five humans and two dogs set off alongside the River Rye heading east, with views towards the grounds of the National Trust's Nunnington Hall.

Passing the impressive buildings of Mill Farm, we continued through fields to reach a minor road at West Ness. From here, a short distance on the road took us to a gently rising track known as *Caukley's Lane*, which in turn led us to the literal high point of our walk, *Caukley's Bank*. From here there were great views across to *Hovingham* and of the low ridge of hills running east to west above *Castle Howard*.

After a short break at the Trig point for a photograph, we crossed the *Hovingham* to *Nunnington* road for a short



Stopping next to a trig

distance to the west. Here we turned north, with great views across *Ryedale* towards *Kirbymoorside* and the *Moors*. A green lane descended gradually into *Nunnington*, where the stone cottages and colourful gardens were much admired. After a quick visit to the bridge over the *Rye* we finished the walk with refreshments at the excellent local tea rooms before returning to our vehicles for the journey home.

Derek Chivers



Walking



August 11 was warm and cloudy as nine of us set off from the Highwayman pub in Sheriff Hutton through the village to the church. We passed by the fourteenth century castle, built by Lord John Neville, and

now in private hands, stopping to look at the remains of the original motte and bailey castle to the south of the churchyard.

The church of St Helen and the Holy Cross is reputed to house the tomb of Edward of Middleham, Prince of Wales, son of Richard III. This is the only tomb of a member of the royal family in an English parish church. From the churchyard we walked to Sheepclose Farm and then to Wheatclose, crossing the Sheriff Hutton to Bulmer Road, through fields skirting Stittenham Wood.

We passed by some beehives (no activity there!), across the gallops to the road. Here we turned right and then

A group of 13 walkers gathered on the evening of 6 September at Welburn village. Walking in good weather, we headed east along the village Main Street, then turned left across the fields to Pretty Wood where



Lots of walkers

we stopped to marvel at the magnificent 400 year old 'King Oak', the biggest tree on the Castle Howard estate. The long-term plan for this wood is to remove the remaining conifers, restore the woodland to its native broadleaves and tackle the Himalayan balsam. We all know about that!

Then a short incline took us to the Centenary Way by the Four Faces folly where we turned left. Further

left over a stile, walking a short distance along the Ebor Way and back through the village to the pub, where seven of us enjoyed a hearty meal. Everyone, including four who had learned of the walk through *Local Link*, had a lovely evening.

Anne Bednarski



Sheriff Hutton castle looms over the group



along, when we reached the road we enjoyed excellent views of the Mausoleum and Castle Howard.

We walked past the pyramid and then turned left through the fields to Temperance Farm. It had been a lovely sunny day and we enjoyed walking back in the sunset to the Crown and Cushion pub, where 12 walkers enjoyed an excellent meal.

Anne Bednarski

The Jewel of York

The Tansy Beetle is a beautiful but very rare leaf beetle. It is a priority species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and is known to exist in only two places in the UK – it is not much more common in the rest of Europe either.

There are multiple sites along the Ouse above York, which led to its epithet of 'The Jewel of York', but the rediscovery of a population at Woodwalton Fen in Cambridgeshire in 2014 meant that this was no longer strictly true!

Much conservation work has been and is taking place at both sites, and 'ark' populations have been established in case environmental problems should eliminate the beetle from any one area. The Ouse is very prone to flooding, as we all know, and the beetle is known to suffer badly during prolonged immersion. For the Ouse population, ark sites have been created on the Selby canal, at Cawood, at Askham Bryan College within its Wildlife and Conservation area, and in the Museum Gardens in York for publicity and educational reasons. This has all been supervised by Tansy Beetle Action Group (TBAG).

Subsequently, York St John's University (YSJU) established a tansy patch on their land by the Foss in 2020, again as an ark, and it was their offer to the RFS of some remaining plants which brought us on board. Community Action for Nature (CAN), led by Will Durrant, nurture a small nature reserve by the Link Road next to the Foss, and they too had established a number of Tansy clumps, so with their help and that of Geoff Oxford of TBAG plus the grounds staff of YSJU, we set about using the banks of the Foss to link the two patches using the donated plants plus some extras



The glorious tansy beetle



A tansy patch aglow

purchased from Mires Beck nursery thanks to a donation from Terracycle.

TBAG have shown that though they are very weak fliers, tansy beetles will walk at least 100 metres from one clump of tansy to another, despite there being relatively hostile territory in between. We were conservative and spaced our clumps out at about 50 metre intervals in the hope that when introduced, the beetles will move from one area to another. Tansy naturally grows in clumps but can be outcompeted by plants such as our enemy Himalayan Balsam and willow. It prefers at least some sunshine, not to be parched, and needs also to be protected from over-grazing (unlikely by Haxby Road!) or grass trimming, (quite likely). With CAN's help we will be looking after "our" plants and will use some spares which are

being grown on by the YSJU gardeners to replace any we lose over the winter.

For reasons not yet fully understood, tansy beetle populations vary naturally from year to year, even without major incidents such as floods. Thus, it will be a few years after the hoped for introduction of beetles to YSJU land before we can be sure that a viable population has established itself. Fingers crossed.

If you'd like to know more about the beetle, Geoff Oxford has written an excellent article called "Biology and Conservation of the Tansy Beetle – 20 Years on" in May 2021 British Wildlife 32(6):411.

Mike Gray

On the Foss

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