



On the Foss

Autumn
2023

News from The River Foss Society

50 years on the Foss

Walking the Years

For the finale of our 50th Anniversary celebrations, we re-enacted the inaugural Foss walk from 12th July 1975 – OK, not quite 50 years, but who's counting?

Around 30 of us, including the Rt Hon Lord Mayor of York, Reverend Councillor Chris Cullwick and the Sheriff of York Ms Sue Hunter, founder Bill Sessions' sons, Mark and Michael, local councillors and members of the Society retraced the walk from Yearsley baths upstream to the Folk Hall where tea and cake awaited. The walk

was bookended by showers but benefitted from pleasant sunshine. It was a leisurely affair, with plenty of time to chat and admire what is probably the prettiest section of the river inside the ring road complete with our native Yellow water lily just coming into flower. The path had been opened up by St Nicks' volunteers scything, and York St John's ground staff mowing the edges. Thank you both!

Society Chairman Michael Alexander welcomed everyone – including four walkers who had taken part in the original event 48 years ago – before we set off upstream, passing on our way the Tansy planted over the last couple of years in the hope of establishing another colony of the beautiful but endangered Tansy Beetle, often called the Jewel of York.

Once assembled in the Folk Hall, having tea and excellent cake in hand, the Lord Mayor congratulated the RFS on its achievements during our first 50 years, and looked forward to another 50 successful years. RFS President Professor Alastair Fitter also addressed us, putting the Society's efforts in con-

text with the multiple problems besetting all our nation's rivers, and our irresponsible squandering of our natural heritage. There is plenty for the Society to tackle in the years to come and we welcome new members and willing volunteers to join us in all the work we're doing now and will continue to do to improve our River Foss.

As well as a commemoration, this was a very sociable event, enjoyed by all who came along.

Mike Gray



A good crowd set off to commemorate the first Foss Walk in 1975. This group included a few of the original walkers!



Our President, Prof. Alistair Fitter, spoke whilst we enjoyed coffee and cake at the Folk Hall, New Earswick



The walkers set off towards New Earswick, led by the Lord Mayor



Ending the Year

Thurs 12th Oct 6.00 to 7.30 pm. Wine Tasting, Majestic Wines, Foss Islands Road. Cost £10 per head. Payment by bank transfer if possible, please. Details from Helen Button or Mike Gray.

Sat 14th Oct 9.00 am Riverside litterpick. Meet at Footbridge on Foss Islands Road. Please let Barry Thomas know if you are coming.

Wed 18th Oct 7.00 pm Strensall Village Hall. October Open meeting and Talk: An Update on the York Flood Alleviation Scheme. Marilyn Sanderson, Environment Agency. Contact: John Millett.

Sun 3rd Dec 11.30 am Christmas Lunch at Novotel. Booking will start at the Open Meeting in October. Contact: Mike Gray.

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Notice Board

We will have a stall at the St Nicks Autumn Fayre on Saturday 14 October 1.00 to 5.00 pm. This will be at the St Nick's Environment Centre and nature reserve.

We've got a table booked for Pint 'n' chat at Brew York, 7.00 pm on Thursday, 26th October.

You can book your place at the RFS Christmas Lunch at the Open Meeting on 18th October at Strensall Village Hall at 7.00 pm. You can book on our website as well.

Summer Litter Picking



These two pictures were taken on Saturday the 17th of June during our early summer litter pick. After discussions with myself and Tim Rane, the boat, Foxy, set off at speed to go upstream to the Huntington Road area, where Tim Rane had identified larger items laid in the river. This included some shopping trolleys, bicycles and traffic cones.

The top photo was taken after we all met up at Castle Mills Lock, some 90 minutes after setting off from the start point. The second picture was taken on return to Foss Islands Road. You can see the results of our collection upstream. All the items were then lifted off Foxy, and placed onto a CYC vehicle for disposal.

Barry Thomas



You can find us on Twitter
@riverfossyork.

And, of course, we are still
on Facebook



For the first time since 2020, The River Foss Society has held a summer Photographic Competition. The first prize winner is Anthony Day for his photograph 'Blue Bridge in Summer'. He receives a £25 M & S voucher. The two runners up each received a £10 M & S voucher.

The prizes were given to the winning photographers

Our Photogenic Foss!

at the Cuppa' n a Chat social on 2 September at the Crayke Nursery cafe.

It's great to see that our members are out and about taking pictures of the Foss which we will always value.



Runner up: *View to Fossway Bridge* by Andy Holt, who wins a £10 M & S voucher

Runner up: *Tansy Ugly Bug Ball* by Helen Button, who wins a £10 M & S voucher

Don't forget our website:

www.riverfossociety.co.uk



A splendid summ

A small party met at the Highwayman Inn in Sheriff Hutton on 28 June. We walked through the village, passing the remains of the castle and out through a new development onto the Ebor way.

A walk across a field led us to cross the Sheriff Hutton/Bulmer road and on to a good track heading towards the wooded area near High Stittenham. The path skirted farm buildings, before crossing the gallops of a local racing trainer. From here, we began a steady ascent by the side of woodland towards Stittenham Wood.

Entering the woodland, we walked uphill, enjoying the sunshine in an avenue of trees. There was evidence of horse traffic on this bridleway, although the recent dry



weather made the underfoot conditions less muddy than on previous visits to this area. From the highest point on our route we had great views towards the Howardian Hills in one direction and back to Sheriff Hutton and the Vale of York in the other.

Leaving the woodland on a descending path, we crossed the road once more, skirting another farm and its fields of horses. Once again walking through fields we turned back towards Sheriff Hutton, again through fields, to enter the churchyard on the edge of the village. After a brief visit to the church we retraced our earlier steps through the village to the end of our walk, and refreshments at Quarmby's café.

Derek Chivers



On 13 July, a record 19 walkers set off from the village on this beautiful warm, sunny evening. We walked along Farlington Beck, through Black Collar Farm across fields by Cornborough Manor then south and west via Lower Towthorpe.

There were several stiles which slowed progress with such a large group but we stayed together (thanks to two backstops), admiring the spectacular views. Some of the stiles were in need of repair and one was particu-

larly challenging where we were required to straddle a fairly high wooden beam - all good fun! The corn was tall and it was quite heavy going in places but everyone was in good spirits.

We saw swift hares, surprised sheep and some interested young bullocks along the way.

Unfortunately, the local pub was closed so 12 of us had a meal at the Ship Inn, Strensall, after the walk.

Anne Bednarski

July 19 was a rather damp evening as six of us gathered on the village green in Oulston for a walk towards the source of the River Foss. Oulston is a picturesque village with many attractive stone houses, some of them bearing the coat of arms of the Wombwell family, former owners of the village and of nearby Newburgh Priory. We walked through a farmyard and then turned right along a cart track, which



although fine to walk along, was rather overgrown, resulting in wet legs due to the recent rain. We climbed slightly through fields, emerging through trees at a viewpoint towards the Vale of York. At this point we could definitely spot a power station in the distance (Drax?) and perhaps even the towers of York Minster a little nearer. Descending, we passed Adams Hall, a farm, before joining a minor road very briefly. Soon, our route had joined that of the 'official' Foss walk, and we completed the outward section of our journey with a brief stop by the reservoir at Pond Head, the generally acknowledged

er of Foss walking



source of the River Foss. From here, we retraced our steps briefly, before joining a lovely woodland path skirting what was obviously a pheasant rearing area, judging by

the hundreds of young birds we encountered. Our final stage took us past another farm and through fields to reach Oulston, and the end of a satisfying walk.

Derek Chivers

Foss Walk Day 1, 21 July

When thinking about this walk, drowned (but cheerful) rats comes to mind. The day started well when three walkers set off from Blue Bridge and then met two at the Hound Lounge where we sat outside and enjoyed a cuppa.

Then off through the fields to Strensall and another stop



for a drink at the Ship Inn. So far so good. We stopped by the Foss Flood Storage Area to read about the project that has been started to lower the water levels

in the Foss during a flood. We took the blue route for a change but near West Lilling it started to really rain.

By the time we reached Sheriff Hutton, it was lashing down and we tried unsuccessfully to shelter under trees for a while. Then it was carrying on with a purpose to reach our destination ASAP, marching through wet undergrowth, negotiating dodgy stiles and getting thoroughly soaked.

The usual warm welcome and delicious meal at the Blacksmith's, Farlington, cheered us up wonderfully and we managed to dry out - a little!

In view of the forecast for the next day we decided to postpone the next leg of the walk.

Foss Walk Day 2, 18 August

The day was much better than on the previous walk, cloudy and cool with only a little rain – perfect for a long walk. Ten of us set off from Farlington through fields, along a quiet road and then past Marton Farm where the remains of the old Augustinian Priory could be seen.

We criss-crossed the Foss in several places up to Oulston Reservoir and noted the area where the spring, the source of the Foss, is situated. We realised the importance of doing this annual walk in order to keep the paths open and clear, particularly after leaving the village of Oulston. We arrived in Easingwold in time for a cuppa at one of the many cafes and then walked across



to The George Hotel where we enjoyed an excellent meal and friendly service.

Anne Bednarski

On 3 August, after a spell of nearly continuous rain, the day started well with sunshine and blue skies, and indeed we only had a few drops along the whole walk.

Four of us met in Crayke and, avoiding the tedious walk along the Brandsby road to Mill Green, took the permissive path past the sewage works, through fields and a wood arriving at the back of the former Dutch House, now renamed Crayke Plant Nursery. Unfortunately it is only open at the weekends so we missed our morning coffee stop.



The views along the walk were very clear and the way well signed. We took extra care crossing the stream as the stepping stones were slippery, and arrived at Pond Head in time to enjoy our packed lunches by the reservoir.

We retraced our steps back to the Foss and after crossing, took a different route back to Crayke enjoying the view of the castle as we walked up the hill towards it. A cuppa and cake in Easingwold completed an enjoyable walk.

Anne Bednarski

Along the banks of the Foss there are many copses, hedges, grassy banks and scrublands. Most are untended, whilst others are regularly flailed or mown, and a few are already well cared for. They all have the potential to contribute to the area's biodiversity, if we can join them up, and may be improve some of them via low key management.

However species rich they are individually, they are vulnerable to destructive events, natural or man-made, but if they are inter-connected, they are much more able to resist, recover or even better, expand.

The corridor project will promote some joined up actions beginning with some low key activities which could make a big difference. What's needed is a mix of habitats to allow various species each to find their

Building a Corridor

*Mike Gray tells us
about a new project
on the Foss*

ideal environment and crucially, for those which are mobile, give them a chance to intermingle and enrich their gene pools. For example, the addition of a few extra local species is an easy, low maintenance way of joining up the dots.

As a first step, St Nicks is cooperating with The Foss Internal Drainage Board to change the way the bankside vegetation is managed. This means modifying the 'one-size-fits-all' approach and managing each section in a way that improves its biodi-

versity, for example hand scything, reduced mowing, removal of the arisings, allowing selected areas of grass and scrub to grow up possibly boosted by seeding with local species or the introduction of bushes or trees.

Our aim is to involve all communities along the river and make the riverbanks, and ultimately the river itself, into something we can all be proud of.

Spring/early summer river management



Along this section of the River Foss the management of the riverbanks is changing. The lower banks and river edge will no longer be mown by the Foss Internal Drainage Board. These sections will be left uncut during spring and early summer to provide food and cover for wildlife.

Two-stage channel

Single stage channel

Water vole burrows

What's in the River?

Professor Alistair Boxall's group from the Department of Environment and Geography at York University are installing auto samplers (right) along the Foss to monitor the levels of several dozen pharmaceutical residues which pass through the sewage treatment process into the river. The pilot installation is on test now and two more will be added as part of a year long project.



Adult Caddisflies (Order Trichoptera – hairy wing) are inconspicuous moth-like insects with two pairs of hairy wings folded back along their bodies, long antennae, generally dull grey or brown in colour, active at dusk and at night and they are closely related to butterflies and moths (Order Lepidoptera – scaly wing). With around 200 species in Britain, Caddis are one of the most diverse groups of freshwater animals as they spend most of their lives, between one and two years as larvae and then pupae, in a wide range of freshwater habitats. The adults live for only a few weeks or couple of months at most, feeding on nectar or nothing at all. Depending on species, the larvae are carnivores, feeding on insect larvae or other invertebrates, or detritivores feeding on algae, plant material and dead organic matter.

Female Caddis lay their eggs in masses on vegetation just above water level. As soon as the larvae emerge, they fall into the water and most of them then immediately start to build protective cases, which is what Caddis larvae are known for and what makes them so interesting. The main reason Caddis are so successful and widespread is their ability to produce a silk thread from glands on their fused mouth-parts, the labium. Case-building larvae use the silk to construct portable shelters built using stones, sand, vegetation and even small snail shells, whatever's available, although quite often the material used can help to identify the species. The cases act as camouflage, protect the larvae's soft abdomen from predators and also from abrasion from coarse particles drifting past. If disturbed, larvae can retreat into their cases, which

Caddisflies – the silk spinners

Barbara Hilton introduces us to another Foss resident



Case-building Limnephilid Caddisfly larvae from the River Foss



Net-spinner Hydropsyche angustipennis © Biopix: N Sloth <http://www.biopix.com/lightbox.aspx?boxid=12618>

are repaired when damaged and rebuilt as the larvae grow. Net-spinning larvae are the most abundant Caddis in running water. They build fixed nets, from both organic and inorganic material, on stones, roots and within tangles of aquatic plants, the net being glued onto the substrate by a silk thread. Trap nets are positioned perpendicular to the current to catch organic particles and small

animals drifting by. Larvae continuously clean their nets by picking off inorganic pieces and consuming organic matter found. As well as being house-proud they are also territorial and defend the space around their nets from their neighbours.

There are free-living species which live in the fastest stretches of flowing water where they crawl among stones and sediment and, being predatory, lurk for prey, in clumps of moss and algae. Whilst moving, they spin a silk thread, which helps them to stay attached in the current. All Caddis are sensitive to pollution, but the free-swimmers are particularly so, hence their need for well-oxygenated waters.

When Caddis larvae are fully grown, they seal the case if they have one, spin a cocoon of silk around their body, attach to a submerged solid object such as a stone and metamorphose into pupae. The pupal cases are water permeable and, as metamorphosis takes place, the larvae undulate their bodies to maintain a flow of oxygenated water around themselves. When ready the pupae have a strong pair of mandibles to bite their way out of the cocoon, they rise to the water surface and use a pair of modified legs to reach land where the adult emerges and can then fly up to three miles for dispersal.



Late Summer Litter

We had another successful litter pick on 19 August, with nine members attending. Barry Thomas got the group set up and Tim Rane ran the rest of the pick. Three members – Tim, Mark Stead and Louise Woodall – worked on Foxy, the Council's boat, and six covered the footpath from Foss Islands Road down to Castle Mills Lock.

Amongst our booty were two supermarket trolleys, a large council cone, a scooter, a sleeping bag, two quilts, a plastic food trolley, a child's surf board, around 20 green bags of rubbish and two blue sacks filled with rubbish. We also removed a fallen tree which was blocking our passage.

Keeping our eyes open

Welcome to River Monitors

River Monitors is a new, long term project, which aims to observe and record changes in the river and its immediate environs, as well as be a record of incidents reported by members and by the public i.e. via social media.

For example, the Green Corridors project (see p. 4) should result in noticeable improvements to the riverbanks over the next five or so years, and there will inevitably be visible effects of climate change. Discharges, legal or not, by Yorkshire water will inevitably continue too.

We're asking both members and volunteers to the scheme to report the following:




- Any changes seen along the river,

- Pollution or discolouration of the water or strong, persistent smells,
- Dead fish or animals in the water,
- Drains putting water into the river when there is no rain,
- Unusual wildlife, fish, mammals or birds (kingfisher sightings are interesting too – we know they are about, but how many territories are there?),
- Unusual, undesirable, or interesting plants (for instance: we know there is Japanese Knotweed lower down Huntington Road),
- Damage to the banks or riverbed or poaching by farm animals,
- Serious blockages of the flow of water.

If you have seen something, contact: monitors@riverfossociety.co.uk. All the information received will be logged and reported on the website under the heading 'Get Involved'. Please help us by reporting anything of possible interest you see!

Mike Gray

Reports

Date/Time **	Name **	Location **	Category *	Comments	Image
12/09/2023 N/A	River Foss Society	Several places along the river	Wildlife	We are monitoring mink and trying to assess their numbers. You may well see some of our rafts moored	
12/09/2023 N/A	River Foss Society	From Monkbridge to the ring road	Damage	St Nicks and the Internal Drainage Board are cooperating in the management of bankside vegetation wi	
12/09/2023 1730	River Foss Society	Sessions Reserve	Wildlife	A still from a video recorded on a trailcam	



Above: Part of the report shown on our website under 'Get Involved'

Left: Section of the Foss with one of the moored rafts for checking mink

On the Foss

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