

Walking Environment Officer's Report 2025/6

Roy Denney

The big interest in our area of late and ongoing is the status and protection of the gems we have in CHARNWOOD: The Warren Hills, Timberwood Hill etc. Wildlife Trust area is now accredited as a National Nature Reserve. The Scheme under the Charnwood Landscape partnership formed by the regional park, has been utilising several million pounds of lottery funding throughout Charnwood but is coming to an end this year but a legacy plan is being devised to continue to protect it and manage it as some form of regional park.

There are still some projects to be completed including some big-ticket ones. A much-improved track from Old John down to the Deer Barn in Bradgate is one such.

The ambition is to have Charnwood Forest recognised as an internationally important geopark which it undoubtedly is.

Speaking as a member of the board of the Regional Park at the end of November there was news that, with the approval of their British Committee, we had submitted our UNESCO application with the endorsement of Sir David Attenborough; we've seen a surge in interest, with lots of new people signing up to the newsletter and as volunteers!

There are numerous groups of volunteers helping in many ways, some directly for The Charnwood Regional Park, some groups under the auspices of the County Council (LCC) carrying out repairs on stiles etc., but some coordinated by the Wildlife Trust and user groups, all improving the walking environment. Our sister organisation, the Leicestershire Footpath Association and working with LCC to identify dangerous crossings where footpaths meet busy roads.

The partnership project was also to enhance and protect the forest area and educate people as to its uniqueness and importance. This should encourage people to protect it from overdevelopment and inappropriate development. As part of that process, a supply of the map I had produced last year has been donated to the Charnwood Forest and, in turn, they have given a copy to every primary school which has outdoor learning classes.

The scheme has invested in new interpretation panels and visitor information hubs at key sites, which members may have noticed. These installations encourage exploring on foot and direct visitors to less crowded areas to take pressure off the honeypots.

The Forest Board is developing a new website that will serve as a central information source for visitors, teachers and volunteers. This Geopark website will provide information on sites, walks, and local businesses, while supporting sustainable economic development and working toward international recognition of the importance of our geological, palaeontological, and cultural historical sites.

The walks on the site were in the large part produced by our members.

The scheme has helped fund roadside paving and the development of new trails, including the creation of new permissive footpaths and the rebranding of walking routes, some of which were contributed by members. Efforts are underway to improve public transportation to the Forest Geopark, which is still under development.

One of the routes being created aims to be a through route from within Leicester to Loughborough via Charnwood. And it includes improving many of the paths

As Area Footpaths Officer, a member of the LLAFF and Footpath Secretary of the Leicester Footpaths Association, Stan Warren did a lot to assist in the early days.

Stan's friends donated money at his funeral which has funded a bench to be provided near the entrance to Bradgate Park, dedicated to Stan. Funds were collected to mark his passing

appropriately. The bench is being made by Bradgate from their own timber and should be erected in March and cost just short of £1000.

I acted as executor to Stan's estate and he left £16,000+ to the air ambulance service which saved his life and is invaluable to us if we have issues in remote places. He left the same sum to the Great Central Railway, LOROS and the National Trust.

We are identifying a route to be called the Stan Warren Way to commemorate the work our late member. It will probably be the route from Glenfield, skirting Anstey and arriving in Newtown Linford facing Bradgate Park. We have some funds left after paying for the bench and will use these to mark this route and if any member wishes to quietly add to this fund at the AGM to enhance this signage please have a word with me.