
FRIENDS OF FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK AND GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

EDITOR'S FORUM

Greetings to old 'Friends' and welcome to the many new 'Friends' who, hopefully, will join us to enjoy the developing Country Park facilities.

The Craft Fair is one of the annual highlights open to the general public. However we want you to participate throughout the year. With this in mind, walks and discussions and events are being planned. A number of advisors have offered their services to enable us all to understand and appreciate the natural wonders which abound in the Country Park.

The changing vistas of tree, plant, animal and bird life is all around waiting to be revealed during the seasons.

Furthermore, preservation of the Reserve is in all our interests. It is our intention to keep a watchful eye on all developments which may affect the area and respond to prevent a threat to its wellbeing.

In turn the 'Friends' will plan and organise a programme of social and practical events in which all can participate.

We are pleased to announce a current membership of almost 60 families. Join us today. You can enjoy the facilities more fully and strengthen the aims of the 'Friends' for an annual membership fee of £3 per family.

MAIN OBJECTIVES OF THE 'FRIENDS'

- To contribute, in whatever way possible, to protecting and developing in a suburban setting this area of countryside as a valuable amenity.
- To promote the Nature Reserve for the observation and study of flora and fauna in their natural habitat.

We trust our purpose will enhance the enjoyment and quality of life for an increasing number of members of the public in the vicinity and beyond.

Newsletter 10p to non-members
Free to all members and *Friends of Forest Farm Country Park*

SUMMER PROGRAMME - 8 JULY, 1990

Walk to be led by voluntary Warden Mr. Chris James. This will follow paths around the Reserve, to illustrate the complexity and diversity of the life there. If you have binoculars, they will be worth bringing along, as we expect to see birds which have raised families. There will also be a variety of seasonal hay meadow and waterside flowers, and the range of insects, including dragonflies and damselflies which depend on them for food.

The remaining summer walks will take place on 12th August, 9th September and 14th October. These will provide an opportunity to look at the changing patterns of life there as the season progresses.

A social gathering is being planned for members to take place in early September (hopefully outdoors) at the Warden's Centre at Forest Farm. Details will be circulated to members later.

We look forward to seeing you at these events.

MEMBERS OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE AND TECHNICAL ADVISORS

Chairman	Mr. Steve Miles
Secretary	Mr. Dennis Davies
Treasurer	Mr. Ted Edwards
Membership Secretary	Mrs. Stephanie Crocker
Publicity and Events	Dr. Dave Jennings
Newsletter Editor	Mr. Ken Patterson

Advisors

Natural History	Dr. Mary Gillham
Ornithology	Mrs. Mairead Sutherland
Reserve Warden	Mr. Mike Wiley
British Trust for Conservation Volunteers	Mr. Chris Small

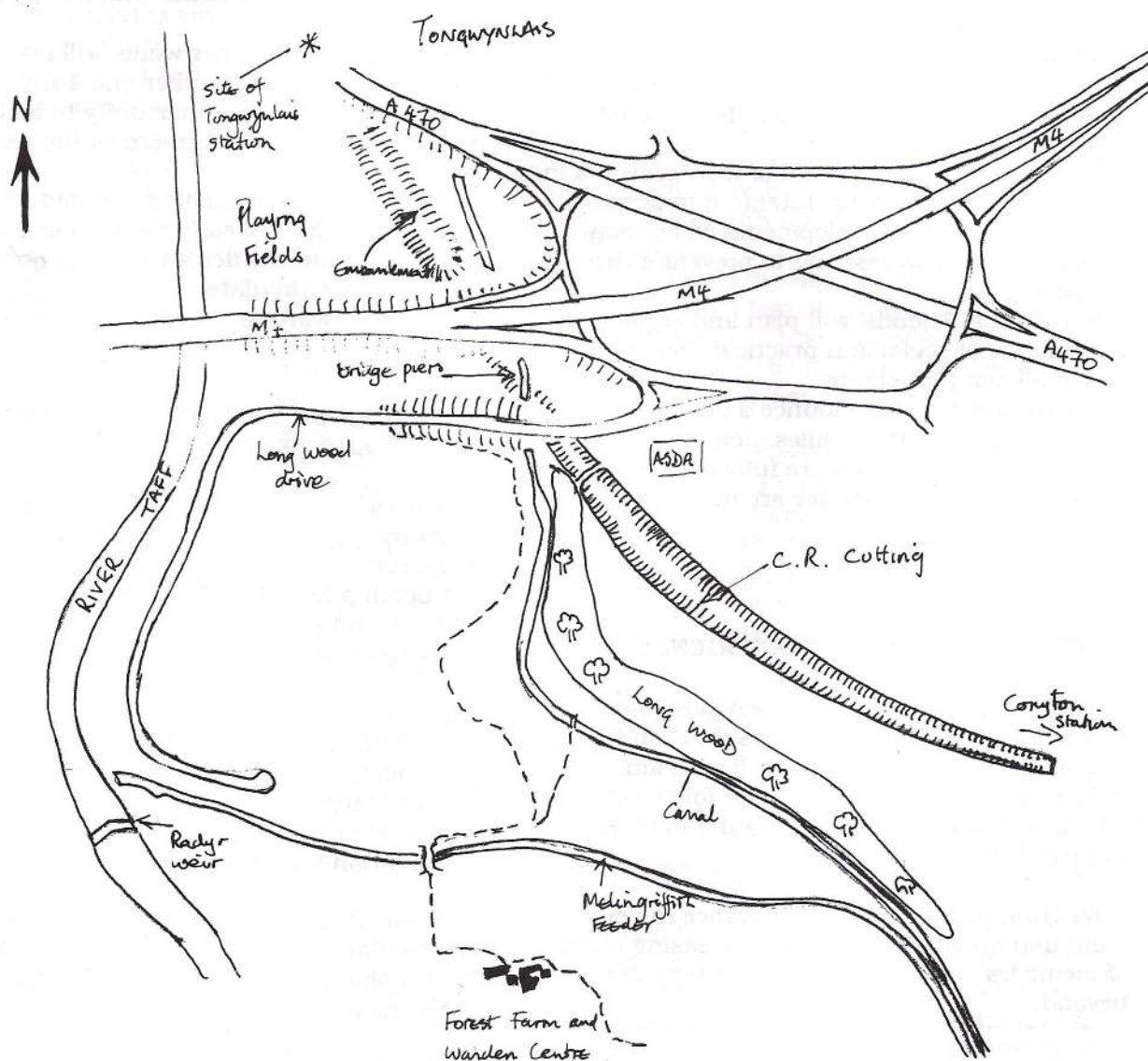
Published on behalf of Friends of Forest Farm Country Park by Mr. Ken Patterson, 12 Manor Court, Ashgrove, Whitchurch, Cardiff, CF4 1BJ. Telephone 0222 627077.

Membership enquiries to Mrs. Stephanie Crocker, 45 Penlline Road, Whitchurch, Cardiff. Telephone 0222 610043

Glamorgan Canal Local Nature Reserve and the Cardiff Railway

The land of the Glamorgan Canal L.N.R. has been shaped by natural forces and by the activities of man. The River Taff, for example, has had a great effect on the landscape during the last 10,000 years, flattening and widening the valley after the last Ice Age. Man's impact by his agricultural and industrial activities has left us with features that are of historical and environmental interest.

The agricultural legacy is the hedges and meadows with their special fauna and flora. (Latin for animals and plants.) Industrial activity has left two waterways (the Melingriffith Feeder and the Glamorgan Canal) both with aquatic and waterside animals and plants. The third industrial feature is the path of the Cardiff Railway.



MAP SHOWING PART OF CARDIFF RAILWAY ON THE RESERVE



DRAWING OF STEAM TRAIN IN CUTTING, CIRCA 1952

The Cardiff Railway was built between 1898 and 1911 and ran from the Rhymney Railway at Heath Junction through Llanishen, Rhiwbina, Whitchurch and Coryton into the Taff Valley north to Treforest near Pontypridd. The owners of the railway controlled Cardiff docks which, at that time, was one of the world's great seaports. The aim of the Cardiff Railway Company in building a line between Treforest and Heath Junction was to divert coal traffic from the mining valleys of the Taff and Rhondda directly to the Cardiff Railway owned docks in Cardiff. This aim of diverting traffic from their successful rival the Taff Vale Railway was never achieved. The Taff Vale Railway prevented them from making a junction with the main valley line at Treforest.

Parts of the line fell into disuse and sections were closed between the two world wars. A passenger service has run from Cardiff to Coryton since the railway was built and is now part of British Rails busy City Line. The section of line from Coryton to Tongwynlais station crossed reserve land. At Coryton, the line ran through a deep cutting to a girder bridge across the canal and then to

Tongwynlais station on an embankment. Remnants of these features can still be seen although Tongwynlais station was demolished around 1972 when the M4 and A470 roads were under construction. The cutting is an important area of the reserve and is under active management to improve the habitat by coppicing*.

The piers of the old girder bridge at the canal crossing are to be seen between the M4 and Longwood Drive. The embankment running to the site of Tongwynlais station stands between the canal at Iron Bridge Road and Tongwynlais playing fields.

The line was infrequently used beyond Coryton until the Second World War. At this time, the then new Nantgarw Colliery (closed 1988) was producing much needed coal for the war effort and the easiest way to move the coal to Cardiff Docks was via the old Cardiff Railway. Coal trains ran regularly from Nantgarw through the reserve and into the docks until the summer of 1952 when a new connection was made to the Main Valley Line.

The well drained slopes of the cutting and embankment are home for a wide range of plants which attract insects and other animals. The ivy clad stone piers of the old bridge at the canal crossing provide nest sites for birds. Thoughtful management of these habitats will ensure that a variety of fauna and flora are retained and even improved. If left untended bramble scrub will take over with the loss of many species of plant and animal.

* Coppicing

This is the practice of cutting down trees approximately every seven years with the effect of encouraging a variety of plants in well lit glades around the new growth of wood from the cut stumps. Hazel and Field Maple are frequently coppiced. In the past, the practice was used to produce poles for building and to provide space for oaks to grow long sagging boughs suitable for boat building.

Chris JAMES

SPRING BIRDS

It has been a good season for birds on the nature reserve. I think that spring is the best time to watch birds, just before the leaves fully open on the trees.

I've had sightings of Buzzard, Peregrine, Cuckoo, plus all the usual warblers. Around the middle of March, a Kingfisher was found on the towpath with a broken wing. I was told that it subsequently died. I thought at the time that this might affect the population, as breeding was about to commence. A few weeks later, in about mid April, I discovered a pair nesting on the banks of the River Taff, near the Reserve.

It was obvious that they were feeding young, as both parents were to be seen flying up and down the river carrying small fish. On leaving the nest, the parents will be seen to dip several times in the river, not fishing, but to wash themselves, as their nests are extremely dirty places. A few weeks later, both parents were seen, plus three young flying together.

The Kingfisher is double brooded (it rears young twice in the same year), and sometimes uses the same nest to rear the second brood, so I'll have to keep an eye on the nest site. Some people still attempt to collect birds' eggs, so it is fortunate that the nest site is inaccessible.

For me, one of the best things about bird-watching is that you never know what you might see. An example of this is the Greylag Goose I recently saw on the river; whether or not this was a truly wild bird, or feral (semi wild) I do not know.

There was also a female Mallard with 15 young, swimming on the river. Although 15 may seem to be a large number, because of predation by Gulls, Mink, Rats and even Pike (They get attacked from below as well as above), the parent will be lucky if it ends up with half of them.

Another day, I noticed that all the tits around the farm were calling, and seemed very agitated. On looking up I saw a Sparrowhawk circling overhead. A few of the braver tits were even going up and trying to mob him.

The nature reserve, with its many different and varied habitats is a particularly good place for bird watching, and over the years more than 90 different species have been recorded.

Our WATCH club (the local group of the Royal Society for Nature Conservation for children between 8 and 14) has helped the breeding population by providing 30 nest boxes. They constructed and erected these themselves - at the last count 21 were occupied.

Let's hope we have a nice summer...

Mike WILEY (Reserve Warden)

BEATING THE BOUNDS

'Beating the Bounds' was an ancient custom on Ascension Day of striking school children with willow wands as they walked along the lines of the parish boundary. Before maps were common, boys knew the bounds of their own parish.

The Country Park boundary walk on Sunday 29th April needed no such methods. The weather was excellent when a group of 'Friends', some accompanied by the children, set out from Forest Farm. They were led by the Reserve's Warden, Mike Wiley. He was ably assisted by Voluntary Warden Chris James.

Our route took us along the Glamorgan Canal path to the Longwood. On the way, the commentary gave us a fascinating insight into the Canal's previous architecture and the abounding flora and fauna.

As a point of interest the S4C television programme of 16th May featured the Glamorgan Canal. It showed old photographs of the former Sunnybank Terrace houses where the local workers lived. It went on to show the canal lock and the Melingriffith mill wheel which is now being renovated.

Onward then to the disused Cardiff Railway cutting which is a legacy of a past industrial era. Crossing Longwood Drive by Asda's, one could see the old piers of the railway bridge which traversed the canal (See the article on the Cardiff Railway).

We skirted the top section of the Reserve, which is served by a path beneath the M4 and returned to Forest Farm via the Three Castles Cycleway. We left the lower section of the river path to the water wheel for another day.

A short chat in the Warden's Centre where we collected some leaflets, rounded off a very enjoyable walk.

Ken PATTERSON

EVENTS PROGRAMME

The 'Friends' meet for walks on the Reserve on the second Sunday of each month during the summer at 10 am at the Warden's Centre. A series of bimonthly talks is being organised for the winter - details will appear in the next newsletter.

Reminder: Summer walks are on the second Sunday of the month: 8th July, 12th August, 9th September, 14th October