

The 2012 Arlington Bluebell Walk & Farm Trail

We should have celebrated our 40th year in great style and hype, but instead it will be remembered as the year when weather conditions were consistently against us! We optimistically opened on a bright Good Friday to take advantage of the Easter Weekend, but that was not to be as from Easter Saturday onwards we experienced the coldest and wettest April on record. This weather pattern continuing into the first three weeks of May resulting in the bluebells staying in full flower, so we extended the closing date by one week hoping the weather would turn warm and sunny. It was ironic to find that the day after we closed, we then experienced the first spell since early March of hot unbroken sunshine!

The car park field was only opened for six days in the six weeks we were open, as ground conditions on our heavy weald clay meant we had to use the road verge, which had on most days a topping of road stone, but no car became stuck or had to be pulled out, which was quite an achievement considering the conditions.

It was tragic to see how all the paths in the Bluebell Wood became unbelievably muddy, in spite of the tons of stone and drainage put in over the years in areas that were inclined to become wet. This meant making temporary tracks in the worst affected areas, but sadly many of the paths were widened by visitors having to walk on the bluebells to avoid the mud. The farm trails were also adversely affected and the Garlic Walk for a period was impassable due to floods!

Naturally the numbers of visitors were disappointing about half of those who came last year, but reading the comment cards many of those said what a memorable experience it had been, but it adversely affected the income of the eighteen charities that participated this year.

Much thought had gone into developing the Memorial Glade for it to be a place to reflect and remember. Seeing the well worn path and hearing comments, shows that for many we have created a spot that has a special meaning. The setting, placing and presentation of the Memorial Book was difficult with many different ideas, knowing how grief and bereavement affect us all in different ways, so we are very grateful to those who helped to get this started, knowing that it will now be an integral part of future Bluebell Walks. It must have offered some solace to those who grieve, as we have had sixteen scripts to add for the 2013 Bluebell Walk.

The coppiced area between the two ponds which we completed in 2010 certainly came into its own this year, with a fabulous display of anemones followed by bluebells giving an intense blue carpet, all due to the extra light coming in and revitalizing the woodland floor which had been shaded for so many years. The area we coppiced at the end of last year on the east edge of Beatons Wood, will show similar spectacular results next year.

Again our thanks go to the Appleton and Johnston families for allowing access on to their land, which allows our visitors many options in the choice of walks they decide to do, so giving them an opportunity to have an interesting and active day out, whilst exploring more of our lovely countryside.

Before we start planning for 2013 we will have to do major works to the paths in Beatons Wood to rectify the damage done this year, so we are not caught out in another excessively wet spring.

John McCutchan