

# NEW FOREST NOTES OCTOBER 2015

## Forest rubbish

Autumn used to be the season when the Forest started to breathe again, relieved of the pressure of summer visitors and with, in places at least, the restoration of tranquillity and a sense that the local community could return to a more normal pattern of life. Such relief is now a thing of the past as we remain under almost continuous siege throughout the year. On a fine Sunday in October the Forest can be as packed as in August. Still, there is a marginal ebbing of the tide once the schools have gone back and it is then that we begin to see the legacy of the Summer's fun – rubbish. It defiles the road edges and car parks and gives a nasty margin to the trails and cycle routes, but worse than all of this is the steady build-up of debris in the depths of the Forest where no methodical clearance is ever carried out. The full extent of this rubbish does not become apparent until the bracken is down from late November onwards. Because the problem is so widespread and beyond the reach or interest of the clearance authorities, it builds up year on year, quite unchecked. A sort of filthy stratum will ultimately form in many places.

I have no doubt that anti-litter campaigns are well-intentioned and can do no harm, but they achieve nothing so far as the depths of the Forest are concerned. A group of youths intent on a rave party deep in the woods or the users of the increasingly common illegal camps (for drug-taking or otherwise), are well beyond the reach of appeals for civilized behaviour. They are also beyond the minimal policing and byelaw enforcement provided by the Forestry Commission. In short, the money spent on campaigns would be far better directed to a thorough rubbish collection within a defined area when the bracken is at its lowest, late in April. The problem is far too great to tackle on a Forest-wide basis, but with enough paid labour and volunteers, a specific Inclosure or portion of the Open Forest woods might be cleared of surface debris each year. However, I don't expect to see this done. There is not enough publicity value or image building opportunity for the authorities in such an approach.

While responsibility for Forest litter may be laid squarely at the door of visitors and those whose actions increase their numbers year on year, there are also two home-grown contributors to the rubbish problem. First there are the fly-tippers, if they can be called home-grown as most probably come from the surrounding towns. Over the last year I have seen three gross instances of such tipping on the Bolderwood Road north west of Lyndhurst. I use that road infrequently, so no doubt there have been many other cases of the offence in the same area. Lorry loads of old furniture, electrical equipment and building materials are frequently dumped in the quiet car parks along this road. The Forestry Commission's arrangements for clearance of such rubbish are very efficient. As with the rubbish thrown about by visitors, the problem of fly-tipping is more or less insoluble. Appeals to the public spirit of white van man with a load of waste to dispose of will inevitably fall on deaf ears. The choice is between an after dark free tipping in a car park with little chance of detection and a hefty charge at an authorized disposal site.

Finally there is one source of refuse which could be removed quickly and reasonably easily, but the authorities choose to ignore the simple remedies. Refuse of various sorts is put outside householders' gates for periodic collection by the New Forest District Council. Back in November of last year I wrote in these notes about the danger to livestock presented by the green garden refuse sacks from which ponies feed on lawn mowings and other poisons. Nothing has been done about this by the council and, so far as I am aware, both the Forestry Commission and the Verderers have done nothing to put pressure on the council. The simple solution is to ensure that collection is from inside the property gate and not from the verge.

A similar problem arises from the black refuse bags which, because collections are so early in the morning, have to be put out overnight. They are regularly attacked by livestock and by dogs and foxes, spreading trails of refuse across the road. Even the temporary dumps of bags made by the collection teams are attacked. In my village large numbers of donkeys have recently been turned out and they clearly find the bags irresistible, making an appalling mess. In the solution of this problem, the NFDC could learn from its neighbours, the Dorset Waste Partnership. That group of councils is introducing a very complex and, to my mind, problematical new scheme of refuse management. However, it does include one useful idea which could be imported to the Forest. In coastal areas, the Partnership is providing residents with heavy duty Velcro-sealed sacks within which the plastic refuse bags are protected against attacks by seagulls. The bags are made of similar material to builders' aggregate bags and are very strong. In the Forest they could be used for both garden and general household waste bags, protecting ponies from injury and ensuring cleaner villages.

### **More about acorns**

It always surprises me that when I write about something fairly minor it seems to generate much more interest than some Forest-shaking new policy or development. So it is with acorns, in that there appears to have been an assumption last month that I was advocating the spraying of vast quantities of Jayes fluid on fallen acorns throughout the Forest to deter ponies and cattle from eating them. My comments were in relation to fields – not to the Forest grazing itself – and I was actually not *advocating* any particular deterrent, but merely reporting what others had found successful. The idea that a few watering cans full of dilute fluid could possibly have any adverse effect upon a mature oak tree seems to me to be very fanciful, given that some gardeners advocate its use for soil sterilization. I have never used the fluid on acorns myself, but I have used it over decades to disinfect cow houses, stables and yard. The adjacent hedge and hedgerow trees have thus received liberal watering with the dilute disinfectant over more than thirty years. They remain in a thriving condition and have never shown any ill-effects. However, I am happy to accept that the use of any chemicals is best avoided where there is a reasonable alternative and that electric fencing is a better solution. Unfortunately not every owner has such fencing available and in some areas a fencing unit would be stolen almost as soon as it is installed. In such instances the careful horse owner may think a little compromise is better than the loss of a valuable and much loved companion. I would certainly not condemn him for that.

### **The new planning authority verderer**

The appointment of councillor Edward Heron as the new planning authority verderer raises some interesting questions about the role of anyone occupying that post today. The position was established back in 1949 when it was considered desirable that Town and Country Planning interests should be represented on the Verderers' Court. In those days, of course, the planning authority was the New Forest Rural District Council or the Hampshire County Council (both had planning roles) and over the years there were some protracted battles between the two councils as to which of them should be entitled to make the appointment. Eventually the county council was triumphant. I served with several "planning verderers" and most interpreted their duty as being primarily to the Forest rather than as a mere spokesman for the planners. Indeed, at times that led to friction between the individuals and their appointing authority. One of the most eminent and knowledgeable appointees was Kathy Heron, the new verderer's mother. This, incidentally, makes Edward Heron's appointment only the second occasion in history when a son has followed in his mother's footsteps on the Court. The other was long ago when Colonel Oliver Crosthwaite Eyre followed his mother (Dorothy) in 1945.

With all appointed verderers, there is the question of whether they should behave as advocates for the policies of their authorities or are permitted to act on their own initiative and judgement, owing loyalty to the Forest rather than to the policies of the local or central government bodies from which they come. Appointed verderers have interpreted their roles very differently with those like Kathy Heron and Alan Rice being very clearly of the latter persuasion.

Today the position of the planning verderer has become even more complicated because the planning authority is now the National Park Authority. Parliament (in the New Forest Act 1949) evidently intended that the planning verderer should be just that. There were no wider objectives of the appointing authority to be considered. It would not have been expected of a planning verderer that he should, for example, press education or public health policies within the Verderers' Court. Today many of the Park's planning policies are, arguably, beneficial to the New Forest, but its remaining objectives are very far from being in sympathy with the published policies of the Court or in tune with local indigenous opinion. Whatever the new verderer's responsibilities may be in respect of planning, I think there is a very good case for saying that the Park's more controversial objectives are well outside that limited remit. Of course the Court as a whole must "have regard to national park purposes" in making its decisions and it has never had any difficulty with this because the purposes are enshrined in statute and are weighted towards protection. The quarrel comes with the Park's often distorted interpretation of those purposes as evidenced by what it does.

I think the new verderer has made a good start (or at least a preliminary to his start) in that he seems to have been the prime force in stopping the Park and others from establishing a new feed of cycling pressure into the north of the Forest. I wrote about this in April this year. The proposal was causing consternation amongst parish councils and local residents in my part of the Forest and, so far as I can see, the Court did nothing to oppose it. This area is, of course, councillor Heron's local

government constituency, but it does show an appreciation of the problems of increased recreation in the Forest and that may serve him well in future.

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