

## New Forest Notes – September 1992

### **Broomy Pound**

If a list were to be compiled of the Seven Wonders of the New Forest, the new Broomy Pound would certainly come near to the top. The pound itself, together with a complex series of run in fences, gates and slip rails has been wholly rebuilt by the Forestry Commission, apparently without regard to expense and to the very high standards now regularly displayed by its craftsmen in prestige projects of this type. Cleft hardwood rails recessed into similar pound uprights create an authentic "rustic" image not possessed by the perfectly functional fir pole enclosures usually built by the Commoners. Indeed, the old Broomy Pound, now demolished, was built in 1965 of sleepers and fir rails and had served the Forest well for a quarter of a century.

As might be supposed, the new Broomy Pound is to serve more than functional purposes. On Friday, September 25th, the delegates to a national parks conference at Verwood are to be entertained to the spectacle of a real life New Forest pony drift. The dilapidated remnants of the old pound were evidently not considered a suitable advertisement for the Forest. The building of a new pound is a piece of window dressing which will be of lasting value to the Commoners and which certainly enhances the appearance of this corner of the Forest.

### **Beehives Past and Present**

August and September are the months when beehives make their appearance on the Open Forest so that their inmates can take advantage of the peak blossoming of the heaths, Beekeepers seem to have their own traditional sites with hives occupying the same corners year after year and causing the same horses(who should really know better) to shy at them season after season. How the hives escape being overturned by Forest stock is something of a mystery. The sites are completely unfenced and the hives appear to comprise attractive night time rubbing places for the ponies. However, they do survive.

This tradition of placing hives on the Forest seems to be of great antiquity, although it is only in recent times that the hives have been unfenced. There is a scattering of "bee garden" place names right across the Forest and in places it is still possible to find tiny embanked enclosures which, with the aid of fencing or hedging long disappeared, contained the hives. Perhaps the best example is at King's Garden Reseeded (north of the A31) where an oval bee garden was preserved when the improved pasture was made. Other place names include Coles Bee Garden near Lyndhurst and Hive Gardens near Fordingbridge. Bee garden earthworks also survive on Ibsley Common.

Perhaps the most widespread and curious of these enclosures are to found on the heaths around Burley, particularly on Holmsley Ridge and Dur Hill. Here the supposed bee gardens are only a few yards square (a few are circular) and have internal ditches and no entrances. They have never been counted, but it is probable that several hundred still survive and they are not confined within the

perambulation of the Forest. Similar features have been found on Sopley Common near Christchurch. I imagine that they probably contained straw skep type hives which would not have survived without protection from stock.

Dating of the Forests bee gardens is most uncertain , although David Stagg's "Calendar of New Forest Documents" does show many offences of encroaching land for beehives in the first half of the seventeenth century. Perhaps significantly many of these offences were in the Burley area.

### **Bracken Spraying**

The extent of this years mechanised bracken spraying has delighted the commoners. The latest target figure I have heard was over four hundred acres and that was some weeks ago, the actual area cover may be greater. The programme promises to bring about the most significant agricultural improvement in the Forest's heaths since the massive war time ploughing campaigns. Certainly in the north of the Forest the landscape will be transformed by this year's work with almost every large bracken area having received at least some attention from the sprayers. Already the fronds are showing signs of yellowing at the tips, although no dramatic change will be apparent until next summer. To the layman at least, visible side effects will be small, the most obvious being some scorching of the underlying and some premature wilting of the heather blossom on one or two sites.

Encouraging to the agriculturist as these first signs are, I suspect that the full potential of the eradication scheme will not be achieved without some fairly widespread follow-up work. One year on, examination of the small areas of bracken spraying within the Inclosures shows them to be clogged with unsightly masses of dead vegetation. This does not much matter where the purpose of the spraying is to eradicate bracken in advance of conifer planting. The forester simply creates the necessary holes for his trees and the remaining debris may perhaps serve as a useful mulch controlling competing plants. On the Open Forest, however, the decaying bracken could choke new grass growth for years to come and create unsightly seas of waste where there were formerly the green and gold's of fern according to the season. Breaking up and scattering the dead bracken may therefore be a necessary step in this work of improvement and reclamation. Chain harrowing is likely to be impossible over much of the area because of stumps and uneven ground. Perhaps the dragging of large baulks of timber might be a primitive but effective alternative.

### **Unwritten History**

The first week of September sees an event which has become something of a New Forest tradition in recent years. The New Forest section of the Hampshire Field Club will undertake the next phase of its programme of excavation aimed at dating some of the enigmatic earthworks which survive over large parts of the woods and heaths. This research started back in 1961 with the excavation of a medieval pig pound at Alder Hill and, over the years, has encompassed Iron Age field systems and villages, earthworks associated with the local Roman pottery industry, Bronze Age water heating sites and many other features.

This slow and painstaking accumulation of knowledge is definitely not for those who hold the popular but erroneous view of archaeology as a "search for gold coins". The dating of a site by a few tiny fragments of decayed pottery is frequently the hoped for climax of an entire weeks work. However, there can be few more delightful ways of spending a late summer day in the Forest than working quietly with pleasant companions in this task of long term detection.

This seasons excavation, deep in the Forest east of Fordingbridge is concentrated upon the junction of two updated earthworks with an Elizabethan coppice boundary. The section welcomes new volunteers and anyone interested in future projects should contact Rosmary Cook, Kinsale, North Greenlands, Lymington.

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