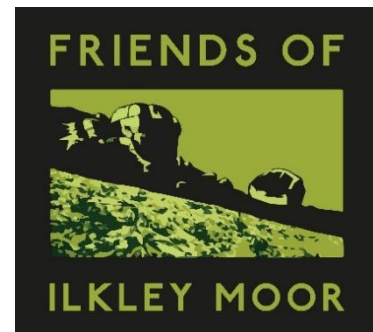


Chair's Report to the AGM 2025



Blanket Bog Restoration

The last year has been the most consequential year in the history of FoIM. Our volunteers are more numerous than ever and have been able to undertake more challenging tasks (more on that later) and in the last year there has been substantial conservation work on the Moor, in the form of blanket bog restoration.

Before last year, there had been only one blanket bog restoration project and that was a by-product of the work done by Bradford and the Environment Agency to limit the flooding caused by Backstone Beck. However, it has always been known that the largest areas of blanket bog on Ilkley Moor, in the recent past, were on Heber's Moss and Crawshaw Moss. We know that in the last century these bogs were sufficiently active that sphagnum moss was gathered on Heber's Moss for use as wound dressings in the First World War. Anyone searching for a considerable quantity of sphagnum moss on Heber's Moss within the last 50 years would have been very disappointed. There was some, but only in very limited quantities near the 'flight ponds'.

That has now changed. In the last year many thousands of sphagnum 'plugs' have been planted on Crawshaw Moss, Heber's Moss and (to a limited extent) on the East side of Keighley Old Road opposite Heber's Moss. This work has been accompanied by works to retain water on the Moor and slow the flow of the streams leading into Black Beck (by creating 'soft' dams). Most of this work has been undertaken by 'Moors for the Future' and paid for by BMDC. However, we, and our volunteers have played a part. We are committed to put £10,000 of our own money into the work. The planting of sphagnum plugs is labour intensive (and back breaking) work. Our volunteers (and to a very small extent your Chair) have played an important part in this. The last planting session was for 4000 plugs in March. Unfortunately, this was followed by the driest and warmest April on record so it is uncertain whether those plugs will have become established.

This work means that two of the more important stream catchments on the Moor have now had work done to try to re-establish blanket bog. As I have frequently said, blanket bog is the finest method of carbon capture and storage on the planet. Blanket bog also acts to limit flooding in adjacent valleys and can improve the water quality in rivers. There is no more important work for us and we are proud of what has been achieved. Not all bog restoration plans succeed and so it was sensible to start works on these areas that had bog until the recent past. But, there are other catchments on Ilkley Moor and, if funds can be forthcoming, there is no reason why we should not try to establish bogs on those as well.

Our Tuesday Volunteers

Our Tuesday volunteer work parties go from strength to strength. From our pool of about 30 volunteers, 15 or so will usually be present every Tuesday. As some of us, through age, become less able to undertake manual work, we are pleased at the number of younger volunteers have come to take our places. The skills of our volunteers have best been displayed by the magnificent project of restoring 'Jacob's Ladder' (the steps up the scarp face of the Moor onto the Dick Hudson's path). It is worth recording that about 10 years ago we enquired whether army engineers would like to undertake this work as part of a training exercise but were told that it was too difficult! We are extremely proud of our volunteers both for their dedication and their skill. They have, of course, been ably led by Bradford's Countryside Officer, Richard Perham.

We have continued to support our volunteers by buying hand tools and we are now experimenting with buying electric brush cutters instead of the petrol cutters that we previously bought.

Litter Free Ilkley



Our other major volunteering effort has been our litter pickers. As they do not simply pick on the Moor but throughout the town, their principal advertising medium has been through their Facebook group 'Litter Free Ilkley'. During the last year they have picked nearly a 1000 of bags of litter. Of the volunteers (most of whom turn out for the monthly community litter picks) there is a small core of volunteers who are active nearly every day of the year. They wear hi-vis vests, labelled 'Friends of Ilkley Moor' so

they act as a most important recruiting sergeant for the Friends and they have had such a substantial impact that Ilkley is now (by comparison with other similar sized tourist towns) significantly freer of litter. Once again, we are extremely proud of them and all that they do.

Our other volunteers

Having established two very successful volunteer groups, we are not resting on our laurels. There are now two other small groups of volunteers working on the Moor under our flag.

Bird Survey Volunteers

We are very pleased that, under Nick Hunt's leadership a small group of volunteers is about to start a proper and rigorous survey of the birds nesting on Ilkley Moor. This is most important as we know that some species, such as the Curlew, have been in decline, but we have no accurate data concerning their success (or otherwise) on Ilkley Moor. A considerable

proportion of the ground nesting birds are waders that, for the rest of the year feed in coastal wetlands. During the breeding season they need suitable feeding grounds near the Moor. These have been provided by the damp, river flood plain. Increasingly this is being built upon. There is now the proposal, by Yorkshire Water, to build an Integrated Constructed Wetland on the land adjacent to Nell Bank. We hope that, if constructed, this artificial wetland will provide valuable additional food for our nesting birds. We hope that now we are monitoring the birds in a proper scientific way, we shall have much more accurate data on which to base future decisions concerning the management of the Moor.

Moorland Survey Volunteers

Ian Condliffe has been responsible for organising the volunteers under the Defra Sustainable Farming Incentive Scheme (SFI). He writes:

Last year, Bradford Council entered the Moor into a 3-year Defra SFI Moorland Introductory Standard. This Standard is designed to help land managers understand the potential of their moorland to provide public goods such as clean water, carbon capture and biodiversity. It also helps them to be more aware of the environmental benefits their moorland provides and to identify opportunities to maintain, enhance, or restore the moorland.

The Standard requires an annual survey over the Moor that involves:

- Identifying and recording the types and condition of soils and vegetation
- Recording the presence of historic and archaeological features
- Assessing the public goods the moorland already provides
- Identifying opportunities to maintain or enhance the public goods

For each of the three years, one random point is surveyed within 10 hectare 'plots'. For Ilkley Moor this involves visiting 70 points annually.

During December five pairs of our volunteers walked all over the moor carrying out this survey. The reward is that Bradford Council will donate most of the £11,500 annual payment to FoIM, to be used for environmental improvements on the moor.

Dog Walking

One of the possible reasons for the decline in the numbers of birds nesting on the Moor is disturbance by free running dogs. As an organisation, we are not anti-dog. We know the huge health benefits that dog ownership confers. Your Chair has a small Jack Russell who more than justifies his keep. But the Covid lockdown led to a substantial increase in dog ownership and hence the possibility of dog disturbance on the Moor. We know that the vast majority of dog owners are highly responsible. Nearly all of them pick up their dog's mess after them (a huge change in the last twenty to thirty years). But just as it is now socially unacceptable to leave dog mess uncleared, we need a similar change in social attitudes about allowing dogs to run free where ground nesting birds are nesting. On the top of the Moor, my dog is always on his lead during the nesting season.

It is probable that the large majority of dogs on the relevant areas of the Moor are being exercised by commercial dog walkers. We have campaigned now for about five years that there should be a licensing scheme for commercial dog walkers on the Moor. I am sorry to say that, as yet, we have had no success in this endeavour. We talk regularly to Bradford's Countryside Service (who agree with us). We have talked to our Ward Councillors. We have done what we can. We would now urge our members to write to Bradford on this matter. The huge advantage of a licensing scheme is that commercial dog walkers would have to sign up to a code of conduct that would include picking up dog mess (which most do at the moment) and keeping the dogs on a lead, on the Moor, during the nesting season. For us, such a scheme is a no-brainer. We wish that BMDC thought the same.

Mountain Biking

This has been another long campaign. We think that mountain biking (particularly down-hill mountain biking) should be limited to prescribed routes. We are well aware of the benefit that young people gain from mountain biking. We do not propose a complete ban, but we do believe that there is an inherent conflict between conservation (and especially natural flood management and carbon storage) and unrestricted biking. There are also safety concerns. We are pleased that signs will soon be put up pointing out that electric bikes are never permitted on the Moor. We are pleased that Bradford will be producing an advice leaflet and that Wheelbase have said they are very willing to help educating mountain bikers on Bradford's policy. This is an element of progress but we remain committed to our policy that there should be no more than two or three authorised and properly designed downhill routes.

Ducks

Members will know the argument in favour of limiting duck numbers on the Tarn (by discouraging feeding). We are pleased that the notices that we funded, have been put up (and not yet vandalised) and that there does appear to have been a reduction in duck numbers (and that toad spawn has been noted in the Tarn).

Membership

For the past many years, we have benefitted from the hard work and expertise of our excellent Membership Secretary, Jon Copland. Jon has now decided it is time for him to retire and we are most grateful to him for all that he has done for us. He writes

"Our current total membership is about 430, and the overall trend over the last 2 years has settled about at this level. Membership retention remains good.

We have introduced a fixed annual renewal date of 31st March for those that do not have an automatic recurring payment.

There is no escaping the fact that we have an ageing membership (like many other similar local charities). So, we will continue to try to broaden our appeal through the range of events we offer (Family events etc). Our 2025 events programme will start later this month.

There are 25 events in our programme this year, ending in October. We hope you will spread the word with your friends and family.

We will also continue to emphasise and publicise the value to the community of our large body of volunteers, that are at work week in and week out on the Moor and in the town – this is free to the community and something that adds real value.

Where we can, we will utilize free and cost-effective ways to communicate with the local community to increase our profile, explain what we do and sell the benefits of joining FoIM.

Whether this is by improving our website, utilising social media, distributing our literature, attending local events and exhibitions or gaining free column inches in the local press.

Our Database

We will shortly migrate our membership database to a new platform called *membermojo*. Our old database has done a good job, but we need to improve the robustness of our IT into the future.

This new technology places more control with our members:

- To smoothly and easily make membership renewals online
- To be in control of their own information; to Amend/Update/Maintain Accuracy as required
- To look up their payment history

It will also make it easy and simple for new members to join FoIM.

We will be sending out details about this to all our members shortly.

Events Programme

Jon (above) drew attention to our Events Programme. We have our first-rate Project Officer, Tracy Gray to thank for this. We have an active programme of events running from May to October. These events (most often led by Tracy) are funded through our Heritage Lottery Fund grant and are a superb way of introducing people (often children and young people) to our magnificent Moor and its wildlife and heritage. Tracy also organises her own volunteer work parties that exist alongside our Tuesday volunteers. We think that Tracy's hard work and the Events Programme have, over the years, added substantially to what we have been able to achieve.

Donations

I should like to draw attention to the fact that in the last year we have received a number of substantial donations from generous members. Our appeal for funds for bracken cutting contributed to this, but perhaps most of all it shows the degree of affection that our members feel for the priceless heritage that we enjoy in Ilkley Moor. The Moor was bought in 1893 for 'public enjoyment'. That enjoyment brings with it many challenges and we try to

mitigate wherever possible the conflicts that necessarily arise between public usage and nature conservation. I hope that our members donations show that we have your confidence in that aim.

Bracken Cutting

This last year has seen the commencement of bracken cutting using a Flailbot. The areas cut have been mostly on the old golf course and around the Cow & Calf. This cutting has been greatly aided by the donations we have received from members. Bracken cutting is quite useless unless it is repeated (preferably twice a year) for several years. One problem encountered has been Natural England's hesitation about allowing cutting during the bird nesting season. Our contention has been that the areas we have been cutting are ones in which there are very few, if any nesting birds. We are pleased that this argument seems to have been accepted and therefore cutting will take place again this year.

Fire Risk

We have enjoyed the driest and warmest April since records began. The consequence is that the fire risk on the Moor is more profound than ever and the fire risk season is longer than ever. We totally support the Public Spaces Protection Order that bans barbeques, Chinese lanterns and open fires on the Moor during the summer months (but we think it should be extended to cover the whole year). We ask our members to be vigilant. The risk to our moor is considerable. If you see smoke rising on the Moor (no matter how little) ring 999 immediately. If you see anyone lighting an open fire or a barbeque, do not hesitate to call the police. Moorland fires cause huge damage. No-one, but no-one, should ever light a fire on the Moor.

Ilkley's Woods



We hope that members will support our proposed constitutional amendments, extending our remit to cover Ilkley's woodlands.

Our volunteers are already active in Middleton Woods. Ilkley rejoices in two outstanding areas of natural beauty; Ilkley Moor and our magnificent bluebell woods. We hope to be able to do for Middleton Woods some of what we have done for Ilkley Moor.

And Finally

I take pride that the Friends of Ilkley Moor is the largest, most securely funded and most active 'Friends' group in the entire area. I am not quite sure how we have managed to achieve this pre-eminent position, but I am most grateful to have been allowed the privilege of being your Chair.

Owen Wells
Chair, Friends of Ilkley Moor