



College Valley Estate Newsletter No 7

January 2009

c/o Sale & Partners, 18-20 Glendale Road, Wooler
Northumberland NE71 6DW

Tel: 01668 281611 Fax: 01668 281113

www.college-valley.co.uk

Photo by Ben Harries—Wilderness plantation

College Valley Estate was bought with funds originally provided by the Trustees of the late Sir James Knott. Sir James was a North East industrialist, MP and philanthropist. He died in 1934, but his spirit lives on through The Sir James Knott Trust. The Trust's website is www.knott-trust.co.uk

The management aims to excel at conservation and provide educational and quiet rural enjoyment for visitors. However, we must live within our means, and any surplus goes to improvements. Farming,

forestry and, increasingly, tourism are funding the estate activities and we work hard to keep the right balance between all these activities. Visitors are welcome. There is a free car park just beyond Hethpool Farm.

Access by car on the private road beyond this car park is restricted to 12 cars per day. A licence to use the estate roads by car can be obtained for £10 from Sale & Partners (Monday to Friday 9-5). When



driving in the Valley, please take care. The roads are narrow and livestock roam freely across the road. Also, you may encounter other traffic, including tractors, quads and timber lorries. Please observe the Country Code, which includes: taking

your litter home and leaving no trace.

Your cooperation will be especially appreciated during the lambing season April/May. It is a stressful time for shepherds.

College Valley battered by floods

Colin Matheson, Land Agent

Over the weekend of 6/7 September, over 10 inches of rain was recorded on Cheviot.

In the early hours of Sunday morning, a massive surge of water bore down the burns fed off Cheviot; the College, Lambden and Elsdon Burns on the north face, Kale and Bowmont on the west side and the Langlee Burn to the south east. The huge flood carried all before it, trees, fences, walls, bridges and fields. In



Hethpool bridge facing the torrent

the College Valley over 4 km of fences disappeared, bridges were inundated and weakened, trees swept away and thousands of tonnes of gravel and boulders deposited along the valley floor.

All our holiday cottages were full with change-over day being Saturday. It rapidly became clear that tenants would be unable to leave the valley since the bridges were under water and swaying precariously and the road at Hethpool was a raging torrent.

The three families of new tenants driving up for their holidays were diverted and bed and breakfast booked round Wooler. On the

Sunday morning, the devastation became clear, but our priority was to get provisions to our tenants and see that they were safe. Bridges were crossed wearing life jackets, and provisions and complimentary wine delivered. The Hethpool Mill tenants left on foot and were taken to Berwick to take a train back to Yorkshire leaving their car, which was driven out later in the week after the bridge was

repaired.

Since that great flood, which luckily claimed no human lives although hundreds of sheep were swept away in the Till valley, we have been repairing the damage. Because the College Burn is not termed a "main river", we only had to seek permission for works from Natural England (the valley is a Site of Special Scientific Interest) who were extremely helpful, responding quickly and efficiently and giving consents where necessary. In a few

years, the miles of exposed and deposited gravel, erosion of banks, creation of great voids and waterfalls will have disappeared as nature heals. Changes to the river and valley have always happened over the millennia – but never in such a violent and short space of time. It comes at a cost to the Estate and its tenants estimated to be in the order of £50,000 to £60,000. Such is the responsibility of land ownership.

John Baker-Cresswell updates news from student research in College Valley

It was another fine year for research in the Valley. We were lucky enough to see much of the resulting work at an event at the Institute of Mining in Newcastle, last December, hosted by Vivien Stapely and Vicky Willis of the Sir James Knott Trust. The work varied from archaeology, to the impact of land-use changes on the botany of the Valley, to the use of satellite imaging to track the spread of bracken. Many will have seen the dig, which took place over two weeks last July, opposite Sinkside Hill and on the lower parts of Harelaw. The site had been identified as a possible Bronze Age round-house in 1981, and the objective was to follow this up. It turned out that the surface effects had been caused by glacial scarring and a collapse of a terrace, rather than by man. The expedition was nevertheless a valuable and enjoyable exercise, and for the Estate, at least ruled out one of our many potential historic sites.

One of the most significant studies for me, was the post-graduate work of Keira Derbyshire on heritage interpretation in the Valley. This is an important objective of the CVE, and an up-to-date outsider's eye on how well we are servicing visitors' needs was very valuable. The directors were aware that there is room for improvement: Keira's study confirmed this and has given us

some useful pointers for the future. Information such as that 50% of the visitors that she interviewed were strangers to the county, and that their main interests revolved around wildlife, rather than land-use, is gold to us in ensuring that we get interpretation right. Unfortunately, the expense of remedying the recent flood damage will mean that we will not be able to proceed as quickly as we would like.

There were two goat studies in 2008. The first, by two Newcastle University under-graduates, Paul Spoons (a 2nd year biology student) and Laura Henderson (2nd year zoology), undertook the annual feral goat census in June-July. Photo identification led them to a total of 150 animals, which was 25% down on the two preceding years and partly the result of the re-homing of 54 animals rounded up in October 2007. The survival rate of kids over the 2007/08 winter was poorer than usual, but the 2008 breeding season yielded almost exactly one kid per adult nanny. During the period of the census, no goats were recorded within the College Valley Estate boundaries: they were all found on neighbouring ground.

The other, by Newcastle graduate Lizzie Ross, confirmed the very high neonatal mortality in the kids and high billy mortality. Lizzie was one of the

two winners of the evening. She has worked several years on the goats in the Valley and has very much improved our understanding of the dynamics of the goat population, which allows us to get the right balance between these spectacular animals and the sensitive habitats to which they are capable of doing so much damage.

The other winner was Chris Slaughter, an environmental biologist at Northumbria University. He examined the diversity of species on three hills, each managed differently. Whilst each site had the same number of plant species at altitude, lower down there were marked differences with the Wilderness area possessing far more species than either hills of grass or heather. We had a prestigious team of judges: Martyn Howat of Natural England, Tony Gates of Northumberland National Park and Kate Wilson of English Heritage, which tackled the unenviable task of comparing apples with oranges with great enthusiasm. All of the work was interesting, and some valuable, in guiding future management. The Valley continues to act as a rich source of topics for students. Their work is having a positive influence on management: I really hope that in return the Valley provides a good experience for them.

Chairman's message: Charles Baker-Cresswell

What a difference a year makes! – except that both 2007 and 2008 were very wet. In 2008 it went to extremes of wetness and this is reported elsewhere in this sheet. The weekend of 6th and 7th September will be remembered for many years to come, and all of us who live around The Valley have our own "survival" stories. More than 10 inches of rain fell on us in those two days – and of course it was "changeover" day in our self-catering cottages! By the end of September, we had had fifty inches of rain at Goldsleugh: our long term average for the whole year is forty-three inches (you can see that I still work in "old money"). There were two beneficiaries of all this water – our trees and our fish. We have planted tens of thousands of hardwood trees in recent years and they have shot up. As far as the fish, many sea trout were stranded when the floods went down, and Steven Crees rescued and returned them to the correct water course.

Two of our Directors have changed this year – James Joicey and John Izat retired. We will sadly miss them, but they both live nearby and they are still at the end of a telephone for their wise advice which has guided us so well in the past.

We have gained Christopher Ward as a Director. He has had a house in The Valley for more than forty years. After a distinguished career in journalism, he became a publisher and now heads what I believe is the biggest publishing house in Europe – think how proud he will be of this Newsheet! He has just finished a six-year stint as Chairman UK of WWF. What a strong member of our team and how pleased we are to welcome him.

Our connection with Marks & Spencer remains close. Felix Karthaus reports on the week when their circus came to town to shoot a fashion feature for Vogue in The Valley. It just shows



that you can meet all sorts of exotic birds beyond Hethpool.

It was excellent to have the University students back among us. We again had a prize-giving night for them in Newcastle before Christmas.

For the second year they endured bad weather. I tried to visit the site of their Harrowbog dig and could not get there since the College Burn was so high. This was a slight fore-taste of The Great Flood.

The Mount Hooley YHA Bunkhouse has proved popular. Like the rest of The Valley it is there to be used and enjoyed by the people of the North-East and far beyond. And like all of our amazing countryside, it needs to be treated with respect as I am sure that it will be.

With best wishes and a welcome to all our readers and our visitors; and with thanks to all who live and work and have their being beside the College Burn.

Les Hardy on wildlife

The year 2008 will be remembered as the year of the great flood and will be quoted alongside the 47 flood, apparently, the 08 being bigger than 47 which was caused by snow-melt rather than rain. A great deal of time has been spent clearing up after the flood, roads having to be re-laid and bridges repaired, etc.

The annual sea trout survey took place on 4th September, just a day before the water started to rise. Scientists from the Tweed Foundation catch, measure, sex, tag and take scale samples from the fish before releasing them back into the river.

The fish are caught by being mildly stunned by an electric current passed



over a metal hoop swept from side to side under the water. The fish still have to be netted as they are only stunned for a few seconds. This is quite exciting as you never know what will come to the surface. One year, a large eel was caught. The whole operation sounds quite straightforward.

In fact, it is anything but and at least one person ends up getting a soaking. Quite often when we walk the measured stretch of the survey water,



we come across a sea trout killed by an otter. No signs this time, although otters are on the increase and a visitor to College Valley got a wonderful photograph early one morning – not easy as these fish-eating mammals are very elusive.

An osprey (another fish-eater) turned up in August, to the delight of a family staying in one of our holiday cottages that I had out on a guided tour. This was probably a young bird developing its fishing skills. Everyone has probably heard of the famous Loch Garten nest site, but these spectacular birds of prey are now breeding fairly locally in the Scottish borders.

On a sadder note, the black grouse numbers are down again, not just in the College Valley, but in neighbouring estates too. We can only hope this will change with some better breeding weather.

Many other species of birds are also declining: spotted flycatchers, regular summer visitors to College Valley, are showing an 85% decline; the cuckoo has shown a worrying disappearance from most of its former haunts in the Valley and there is talk of adding it to the Red List, making it one of the UK's most endangered breeding birds.

In the case of the cuckoo, one reason given is the decrease in moth numbers. Not all species are showing losses, there are some winners, stonechats are much more numerous in the valley and nationally. Nuthatch are up 71% and buzzard 56%. Generally, honey bee numbers are down and bumble bees also suffering badly, one of the many reasons given is the increase in badgers, which dig out their nests. Butterflies suffered in the wet weather, with moulds affecting many species during hibernation. Happily, I can report a comma butterfly spotted near the Lynn: a first for me in the Valley.

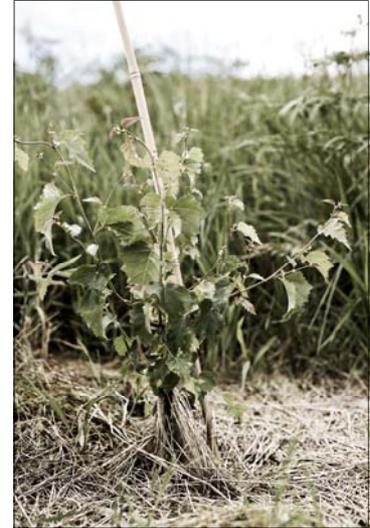
Hazels being wind-pollinated suffered from the wet and the sloe gin-makers suffered a lean year as sloes were very scarce. So here is hoping for a good spring and summer and it will be interesting to see what colonises the



areas affected by the flood, giving new opportunities to many species of flora and fauna.

M&S

has supported the planting of trees in College Valley to off-set the carbon produced by its furniture home delivery service.



This summer M&S also used the Valley as a background for the model Lily Cole promoting its autumn collection in Vogue.



Photos by kind permission of Ben Harries

WHY I THINK THE COLLEGE VALLEY IS SO SPECIAL

by **Christopher Ward**
College Valley resident,
journalist, publisher and recent
chairman of WWF UK

Everyone who knows the College Valley can remember the first time they set foot in it. Who could possibly forget the moment they discovered the existence of this real-life Shangri-La, an earthly paradise so isolated from the outside world yet so close to it?

I came to the College Valley for the first time on a fine May day in 1963 after walking over the hill from Kilham to the Shank, then on to Elsdonburn before dropping down to Trowupburn. From there I climbed to the top of Loft Hill and gazed down in wonder at the golden carpet of gorse in the valley below me, the sweet peach-like scent of the gorse carried in the gentle breeze. The College Burn glittered in the sun like a silver snake; clouds threw ever-changing patterns of light and shade across Cheviot; the air was filled with the bleating of a hundred lambs. I thought I had arrived in heaven which is why I have kept coming here ever since. Now fast-forward nearly half a century: all around us in the world is Armageddon. Arctic sea ice is melting, fish stocks are collapsing, rainforests are being destroyed, endangered species driven to the point of extinction. Yet to all appearances the College Valley remains relatively unchanged from that day in May 1963 when I first set foot in the Valley. How is this possible?

Sheep still graze on the hills in the company of a few wild goats. At Hethpool, the farm manager with a red face, raucous laugh (and a generous hand when it comes to pouring a dram) is still called Elliot, albeit a second-generation version. Sea trout still come to spawn in the burn, wreckage from crashed planes still mysteriously rises up from the peat on Cheviot. The terrier show continues to take place on the first Sunday in August. The road retains all the familiar potholes. You can walk all day in the hills and still not meet anyone else. But when you *do* meet someone else, they will almost certainly have something interesting to share with you. Some trees have been felled but others have been planted. You can swim in the linn and swallow a gallon of water and still wake up alive next day. No political meetings have taken place here, nor any rock festivals staged. Nothing – or certainly nothing important – has changed. What a relief.

Not surprisingly, I had almost come to take the College Valley for granted, the best-ever argument for leaving things alone. But last year something happened to change my understanding of what was going on around me. After a 42-year probationary period I was asked to join the board of directors of College Valley Estates. They don't rush into things these people, and thank goodness for that.

If it seems as if the College Valley has been suspended in time, I now know that it is because of the tremendous amount of work that is done behind the scenes to ensure that it seems that way. But



Christopher and Nonie with their dogs.

this has not been achieved by standing still or obstructing change. Quite the reverse. It is about making conservation the ongoing priority and embracing change where necessary.

Nothing happens by accident. Young trees are nurtured, sea trout monitored, Sites of Special Scientific Interest protected, goats counted and herded. A concern and priority right now is what to do about the changed course of the burn following last September's floods.

The Board consults and works with a dozen or more government departments and NGOs who have a shared responsibility for the environment. Walkers, archaeologists, DEFRA, the Tweed Commissioners, the Northumberland National Parks...they all have their say. It seems amazing sometimes that anything gets done with so many meetings and so much consultation. But it does. And with fewer resources than we would like, including funding, great strides are being made to keep the College Valley the way it always has been and, we hope, always will be. For it really is one of the world's most special places.

In a small corner of the world...Regular readers may remember that oak trees from College Valley have been planted in 2006 in Collingwood, Canada. Collingwood was an Admiral who fought at Trafalgar and lived at Hethpool in College Valley. Heavy snow has prevented pictures being taken, but the trees are believed to be doing well.

Holiday cottages: Coldburn (4) - Dunsdale (8) - Hethpool Mill (4) - Mounthooley Bunkhouse (20)
Cuddystone Hall: meetings, parties, weddings - Grouse shooting and fishing - Guided tours on request
For further information please contact:
Sale & Partners, 18-20 Glendale Road, Wooler, Northumberland NE71 6DW Tel: 01668 281611
Also: www.college-valley.co.uk