

The Village Footpaths and Streams Project.



It was following a spring walk along the footpaths bordering the many streams below our villages to the north west of The Street in March 2009, that it struck me just how unkempt and overgrown these areas had become. It was clear that no maintenance had been carried out for some considerable time, with some stretches of stream bed containing stagnant water due to the build up of silt resulting in the cessation of their flow, while other streams were almost invisible to walkers due to the denseness of the undergrowth that had grown over them.



The flow of the main stream was severely curtailed by this fallen tree – March 2009

That the area would benefit from some maintenance was clear to see, the dilemma being how to bring this about. By asking questions of senior local inhabitants the history of this piece of land began to emerge. Going back many years, villagers have cultivated water cress in the shallow stream beds below the village. This activity partially explains some of the strange meanderings I noticed while walking the adjoining footpaths, one such stream performing a 90 degree turn along the side of a slope! Another factor favouring water cress production is that many of the streams are fed by spring water, the springs rising in at least three different locations on this land. The largest water source is hidden away in a back garden while another is clearly visible at the end of a short spur stream adjacent to the bridge at the foot of Fen Lane.

As a result of these ponderings, I took some photographs and brought them along to a Botesdale Parish Council meeting at which I suggested that the Parish Council be involved in generally tidying

up the area to encourage more residents to discover for themselves the delights of this diverse environment. The outcome was that democracy took its course and the proposer was 'chosen' to move the idea forward.

A frustrating period followed while landowners and official bodies were contacted in an attempt to establish just who was responsible for the upkeep of these watercourses. No one owned up! Consultations also took place with officials from the Suffolk Wildlife Trust and the Little Ouse Head Waters Project who provided much valuable advice and guidance. By November 2009 this phase was satisfactorily concluded and an appeal for volunteers was made via the pages of the Parish Magazine.

The appeal was a success and on Sunday 17th January six of us met at 10:30 A.M. in The Bell car park for a very brief briefing (it was bitterly cold), before setting off down the footpath which is located almost opposite the Botesdale Post Office and leads to the area in question. All of us were laden with tools, ready to start the first of four such working party expeditions completed to date. The work is varied and ranges from general litter and tree debris clearance, to the removal of fallen trees and manual 'ditching'. Much digging has also been carried out along one stretch in order to remove a number of railway sleepers from the stream bed. Our two hour sessions usually conclude with a pint in the pub. One more working party is planned this spring before the field work is closed down for the summer before recommencing in September.

Our efforts to date have made some visible difference, although much remains to be done. The projects long term aim being simply to manage the habitat with the minimum of intervention for the benefit of flora, fauna and those in the local community who walk these paths. If you are interested in helping the group achieve their aims then please contact Chris Lambert on 01379 897053 or via email at chrisd.lambert@googlemail.com