

TABLEHURST AND PLAW HATCH COMMUNITY FARM NEWS

SUMMER '08

Take a walk with your shopping

Some of you will have been on the farm walks in April and May this year which have been led by Tom and were the first in a series of walks which are being held on the first Saturday of every month (meet outside farm shop at 10am).

As a community farm we have always operated an open access policy, but as many of you may be worried about walking around the farm in case you get lost or meet strange dogs, cows or farmers ... so we have decided to create a self guided route around some of our 200 acres.

We have been fortunate to receive some grant funding from the High Weald Landscape Trust towards the start up costs of this walk. Becky, from our Management group, and David, a local Health and Safety Consultant, have designed and created a walk around the fields and tracks of Plaw Hatch Farm over the last few weeks. The next step is to construct a series of stiles and gates, and to put up arrows so everyone can find their way around.

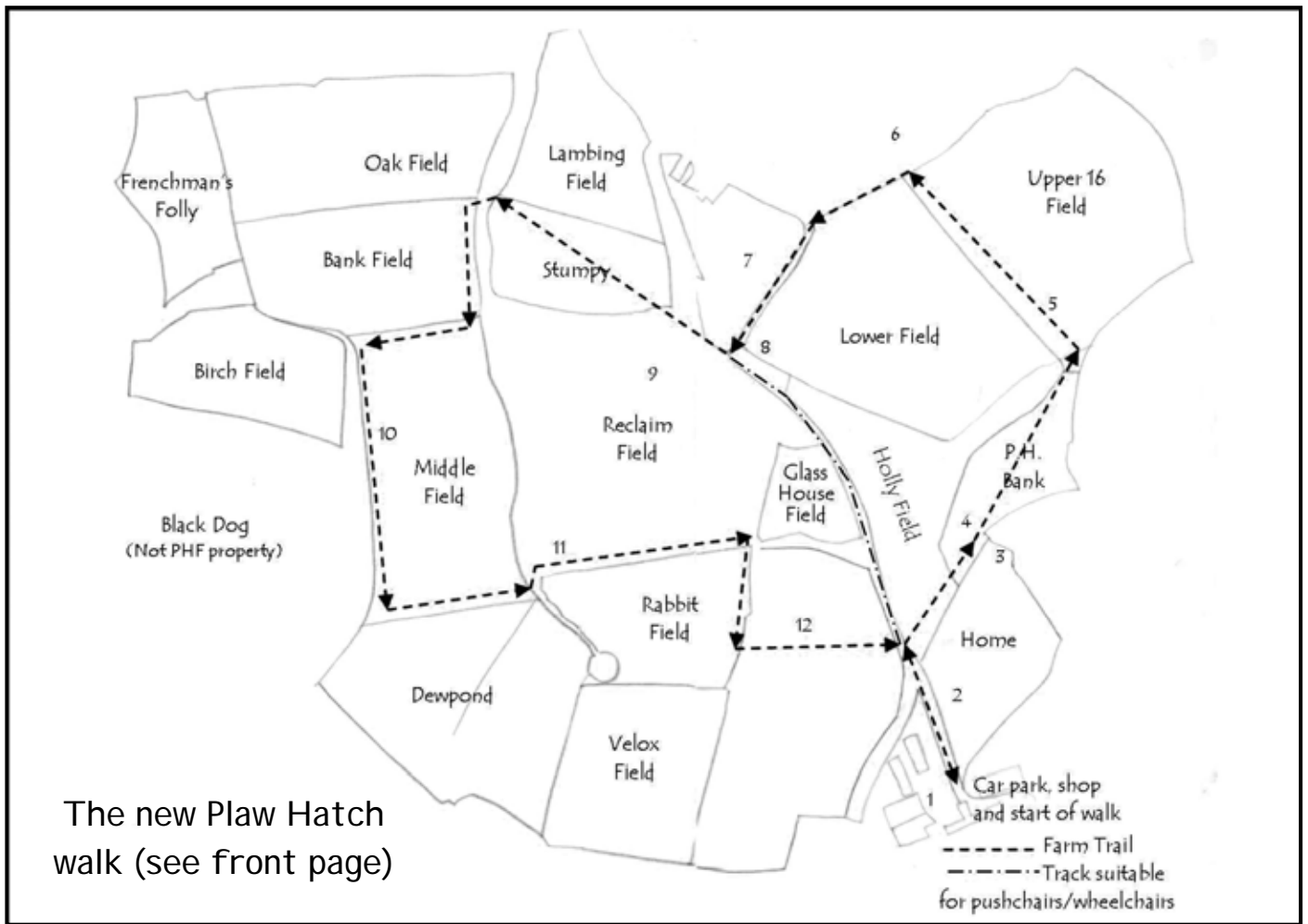


By mid summer we hope to have created and printed leaflets showing the route which will also be packed full of information about the farm, how we farm and why we farm the way we do!

The self guided route (see overleaf) and leaflet will provide safe, free public access all year round so when you come to shop, you can walk round this beautiful landscape and learn about the vibrant farm which your shopping helps to support. Look out for the leaflets and signs – coming soon!

For more information, contact me on 01342 825453.

Becky Johns



Old Friends

Regular readers may recall that Andrew Carnegie and Bernie Jamieson left Tablehurst Farm last autumn to start a new life in France. They have moved to Les Quatre Saisons, (www.les-4-saisons.com) in a tiny hamlet called Chignat near Soubrebost in the Limousin region. There they have a house in about 5 acres of land, from which they are offering a range of accommodation including camping, B&B, evening meals, as well as space to run workshops in the property's considerable out buildings. An important aspect of their plan is to run camping holidays for Camphill and similar groups, for which they have the special facilities needed as well as their own personal warmth and skills. But they offer an equally warm welcome to all individuals and families. The house is on the route of the so called GR4 which in ancient times was one of the old pilgrim routes to the shrine in Santiago in Spain. It is set in very unspoilt and quiet rolling countryside, with a rich mix of woodland and small farms, and an abundance of wildlife. The beautiful Lac de Vassiviere is nearby for water seekers, and the local roads and footpaths are deliciously quiet with great scope for exploring by foot, bicycle, horseback, or even car! And if you want France and French there's plenty of history and culture to be found in the local towns.

Monica and I very much enjoyed a week with them in June and were impressed by their exciting venture. During our stay we enjoyed Bernie's fabulous cooking. Like many good cooks, she makes superb cuisine look effortless, serving it with a modesty which belies its quality. The emphasis is of course on organic and local food, with their own garden making a growing contribution; it was good to see Andrew's meticulously weeded rows of onions in their first season!

Oh, and one other thing; they are no longer just business partners and friends but were married in May! We send to them our congratulations and warmest good wishes, and every hope for success in their venture.

Mark Haughton



Kohlrabi (*brassica oleracea caulorapa*)

(rapa = root, caulis = cabbage in latin)

This is slightly misleading. Kohlrabi is not a root, it is a thickened stem. We know very little about its origin, probably in the Mediterranean and Middle Asia. Plinius writes about the thick stem of the Pompeian Cabbage. In 1857, Jäger wrote in a German herbal: Kohlrabi is the most loved, widely spread and profitable vegetable because of its valuable properties of maturing earlier [in May] than other cabbages and because of its keeping properties from autumn until the next spring.

Lemony kohlrabi tops with carrot

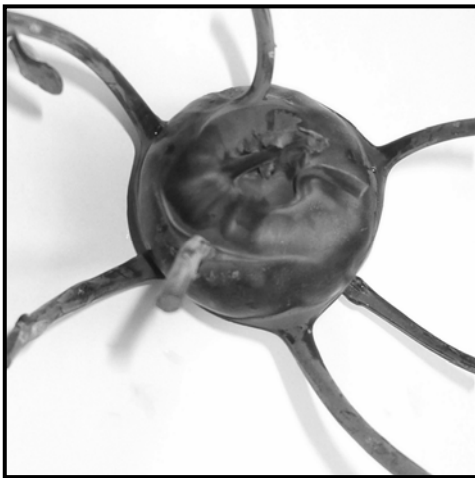
Heat oil in a wok

Fry some mustard seeds until popping

Add grated carrot and chopped kohlrabi tops

Stir fry, adding plenty of lemon juice

Serve with dahl and rice.



I sow kohlrabi in successions every three weeks from January (in slight heat) until the middle of July. They are more difficult to grow in the middle of summer because of drought and flea-beetles.

I find that most people who try kohlrabi get hooked very quickly. It has a sweet, mild taste. When they look too temptingly at me in the garden, I just peel a “gardener’s” kohlrabi (i.e. a split or mis-shapen one) and eat it like an apple.

As children, we would snatch them

from my mum, as she was peeling and chopping, before she got any chance of putting them into a soup.

Kohlrabi is rich in minerals and vitamins, similar to cabbage and cauliflower. Even though some people throw the leaves away, they contain twice as much vitamin C, 100 times as much carotin, as much iron and calcium and much more chlorophyll that the bulbous part.



Kohlrabi soup

Simmer 600g kohlrabi, 200g carrots and 300g potatoes in one litre of water with a vegetable stock cube for half an hour. Mix two tablespoons of wholemeal flour (ideally freshly ground) with a little cold water and add to the soup. Boil briefly and blend everything. Add parsley, salt and butter to taste.

How to eat it? In soups, stews, gratins, grated into salads or just sliced. The leaves can be cut up and go with the root into soups etc.

If you want to eat the leaves raw, it's best to chop them finely, sprinkle salt and lemon juice on top and work them with your hands (like a bread dough). This makes them softer, tastier, juicier. They can also of course go into juices and green smoothies.

Dorothea Leber

Spring Birdsong at Tablehurst



We assembled – about 20 of us – under the canopy in front of the farm shop, sheltering from a light April shower that we hoped was just passing by. No such luck. As the rain intensified, Tom Forward, our guide for the morning, shrugged his shoulders, smiled brightly and set off across the farmyard towards the lower lake. “The idea of this walk”, he explained “is to explore the bird life on the farm. Hopefully, we will manage some sightings as we go, but the main idea is to listen.” We had been going less than a minute, most of us oblivious to our surroundings, when Tom

paused, ears cocked in a pose that would become familiar as the morning wore on. Our first encounter (what is the aural equivalent of a “sighting”?) was a blackbird, lurking in a tree close to Mill Cottage. As I stood in the rain (proper wet stuff now) attending as best I could to the noise of a blackbird hiding in a tree, I did briefly wonder what exactly I was doing on this outing. Along with the rest of the group, I peered into the tree to see if I could spot this most commonplace of garden birds. It took us all a little longer to realise we didn't *have* to see them.

As we walked on, my ears now becoming attuned, I realised that we were surrounded by birdsong, but of course to my untrained ears, it was all in a foreign language. Not so for Tom – not only could he translate song thrush, chiffchaff, wren and sparrow into English, with detailed explanations of why they were all singing, he could speak, sing and twitter most of these languages too, so that when he had identified a particular call amongst the random clamour the rest of us were hearing, he could offer a brilliant imitation to help us pinpoint the individual song of the bird in question.

We walked through the fields to the upper lake. Tom's face lit up as he caught the distant song of a skylark. He explained how these birds, once an absolute commonplace of English farmland, have suffered drastic reductions in numbers as a result of intensive farming destroying their ground-nesting sites. Skylarks are quite easy to spot, since they announce themselves loudly and hover for long periods high in the air. I never did spot this one, although its tumbling liquid song stayed with us for a good part of our walk.



I asked Tom how he had acquired his – to my untrained mind – magical powers of identification for bird song. He explained that he had worked for years on nature reserves, and that his duties included surveying the local bird populations to estimate the numbers of each species present. “Quite a while ago”, he said, “I gave up looking altogether when doing bird counts. Of course you *can* see many of the birds if you work hard enough at it, but many species are very shy, and anyway, it's just so much easier to listen”. This was a revelation to me, and yet at the same time – based on about half an hour's experience of Tom at work – perfectly obvious. Why poke your binoculars into dense bushes to find a hidden wren if it is raucously broadcasting its presence all the time anyway?



We arrived at the edge of the lake just as the rain eased away to nothing and the sun broke through, and paused to watch a tufted duck



fishing in the water. A fine-looking fellow in crisp black and white, the tufted duck is a diver, so disappears under the water for several seconds before reappearing in the wrong place. Disorientating, but amusing to watch. Meanwhile, Tom was explaining song thrushes. “A really bold song, and usually a strong, repeating phrase”, he said, “but not the same phrase all the time.” We all nodded wisely as if we understood. A moment later, he was distracted by a much more distant sound – a clear bold call from deep within the woods on the edge of the farm. He instantly identified as a nuthatch staking out its territory.



As we rounded the top of the lake, Tom spotted a big bird flying high in the distance. There was a moment's hesitation before he confirmed that it was a buzzard – a bird of prey which until recently was only seen on the moors and mountains of the north and west, but which is beginning to penetrate further into south east England. As we all scrambled with our binoculars, the one bird became two, then three and eventually four. Not only that but they came our way and put on a magnificent flying display over the lake which really felt as if it was specially for our benefit.



As we returned to the farm – almost in time to avoid the next downpour – I felt I had been treated to a wonderful insight into the commonplace background sounds of the countryside, and a completely new way of seeing (sorry



hearing) Tablehurst Farm. Despite the pretty tufted duck and the command performance

from the buzzards, my favourite bird of the day was small, brown and nondescript. The chiffchaff – a tiny, and to my eyes invisible, warbler – accompanied us for the entire walk. These little birds, whose presence I had never observed, seemed to call from every tree, endlessly repeating their own name for the benefit of the forgetful. All in all, a fascinating and enchanting couple of hours. Thank you Tom.

Chris Marshall



Plaw Hatch Shop News

As most of our customers are aware, Alex is no longer working in the farm shop. He has decided to go back and pursue his love of gardening and work in the great outdoors. Unfortunately, this has meant that He, Tamara, Dylan and Sofia will no longer be living with us at the farm. The family would like to thank all the friends and customers at the farm for their support and loyalty and will still continue to be regular faces within the community! Following this, it remains that we don't currently have a 'shop manager'.

I would like to introduce myself to those who don't know me. My name is Naomi, and with lots of help from Tom, Julia, Susan, Becky and the fellow shop staff, I will be taking care of things until we find our new manager. We would like to take care and time over who we want to employ to help us pursue our dreams and visions for what is a significant part of our community. So, on behalf of everyone here on the farm I would like to thank customers for their loyalty and patience through this difficult, but exciting process. We appreciate all your feed back and support.

Naomi Rogers

A new face at Tablehurst Farm

When I was 3 years old someone asked me what I want to do in life and I answered: „I want to take care for the plants and make sure that everything grows on the fields and nothing wilts“. Well, I don't remember that and it has taken me a long time to realise that hand-on farming is really what I want to do. Nearly 4 years ago I came to Emerson College after I had quit my studies in agribusiness. I had realized that considering farming as an industrial activity creates many of the problems we face today and I was looking for a new approach.



During my training at Emerson one thing made me understand the significance of growing *good* food and that was a conversation between Pfeiffer and Steiner after a lecture he had given. Pfeiffer was wondering about the discrepancy of thinking or realising the right thing but not acting accordingly and Steiner answered: "that is simply a matter of nutrition". That was the point when I knew my task is working for biodynamic agriculture.

Having been on Tablehurst as a student and after my graduation, it did not make me want to stay to be honest. It is really hard work and my placement time on a farm in Norway seemed to be a real holiday in retrospective. I was also critical of many things on the practical farming side but I realised gradually the *social* significance of Tablehurst and grew to appreciate what Peter had achieved. After many conversations with him, Steffi and Raphael it became obvious that we share a common vision for the farms future resulting in the first big change- a completely different approach to cultivations and with it a shift in the livestock-arable balance of the farm. I think this sharing of a common vision and the willingness to change made me join the farm team. After a period of expansion I hope to contribute to a consolidation of what has been previously achieved and to direct more awareness to the arable part of the farm. As the social-economic environment is changing, so has the farm to change and with the current team I am very optimistic that we will be able to manifest our ideas in the course of the next years.

David Junghans

Tablehurst Farmer's Notebook

Life for us at Tablehurst seems to go past like a whirlwind and we try and hang on for the ride and see to it that everything gets managed and done as best as possible. This is not an easy feat and there is always much room for improvement! This is a particularly busy time of year. The yards, which the animals were in throughout the winter, have all been mucked out. The manure has all been put through a large hired manure spreader, with special boards on the back, so that the manure is completely broken up, aerated and left in large windows to compost. The biodynamic compost preparations will go in next week. In the autumn the spreader will be hired in again to spread the by-then compost on to the fields. We have been making silage, but it has been very slow going because we do not get any long stretches of good weather to enable us to cut large amounts at once. This is very frustrating, as we should have finished the entire first cut by now and we still have much to do. It is also time consuming and makes it difficult to plan in the other work.

Last Wednesday we had fifteen regional bank managers who came for a 'volunteering day' from HSBC. This was part of a conference/meeting; they came from the whole of the south of England. It was basically to give them a bit of a different experience from that which they normally encounter! We put them into different groups and they helped vaccinate cattle and sheep (which entailed catching them!), and with tying up the gooseberries on to wires. They had lunch together with us in the sheep barn and went off having greatly enjoyed their day. They are generously donating £2500 towards the education project.

On Thursday the turkey chicks arrived. We have put up new temporary pens for them in the sheep barn where the lambing pens were until they are big enough to move up to the field. Turkey chicks are inclined to be delicate creatures, so they need a lot of care to detail at the beginning; it can be a bit worrying for the one responsible. Being organic they are very expensive and it is not really possible to replace them at this time of year, so that they will be ready for Christmas.

On Saturday Stein and Noor had their wedding. They run the Tablehurst apple orchards and have over the last couple of years bought over 20 acres of their own land and planted it to fruit. The wedding took place on their land and the reception in the large barn, which Stein has erected there. It was a beautiful and happy event with lots of friends, many from Holland. The only dampener at the end was that Holland lost the football to Russia that evening!

Stuart, Clive and Terry are getting on well with Max and Lucy and their little boy Noah; you might remember they joined us in January. Sandia is also still in the house (since last September) where she is a quiet but positive presence. We have again had an unannounced annual inspection of the Care Home, which went very well. We received the 2 stars for good instead of the 1 star denoting the very top mark of excellent, for which we had hoped! On 1st September I am taking Stuart, Clive and Terry for ten days to stay in Andrew and Bernie's new place in France (see page 2).

There are going to be some changes in our shop. Richard and Melanie, who work with Barry and Rosemary, have decided to leave us and move down to Devon. I would like to thank them for the work they have put in over the last years and we wish them very well for the future. Richard will go down there as soon as Barry and Rosemary get back from the two weeks holiday they will have in July and Melanie will follow with the rest of the family when they have found the right house. We will therefore be looking for a good experienced butcher. We would like to find someone who has the potential to take over from Barry as he is hoping to start taking things a bit easier, maybe working one or two days less a week. It seems a tough order but I am sure we will manage.

Charlotte is progressing with the food processing/café in the old shop. Because we have had to apply for planning permission for a change of use before we are allowed to sell hot drinks etc, she is starting with the processing side of things. She already has delicious chicken pies on the shelf, which we hope will soon be followed by a variety of pies and cooked sliced meats etc. We will keep you informed of developments.

As you know from the last newsletter, Steffi and Raphael moved into their new house just after Christmas and now 2 of the 3 apprentice rooms are virtually finished. We are very pleased with the way the building has turned out and we will show it off to you when it is completely finished. It is, of course, due to the generosity of many people that we have been able to build it at all, for which we are very grateful. We still have about £7,000 of matched funding available, which will make it £14,000 if we can raise it. This will be enough to finish the building and heating, but it is now extremely difficult to raise this last bit! I have enjoyed the building work, first with the chicken processing building and then the accommodation, but it has at times also made me feel torn, due to not being able to give enough time or concentration to either the building or the farm. It is good to know that I will be able to give my attention more fully to the farm from now on.

Neil Coomber, who joined us last autumn and who took on principally the workshop, machinery and poultry moved on a few months ago. David Junghans (see above) has recently agreed to join the permanent staff and has become an important part of the farm team. We now therefore have David, Steffi, Raph and myself as the principal farmers with certain areas of responsibility. Max, who also runs the house with Lucy, is learning to farm and is doing the poultry very well at the moment. In September, both this year and next, he will attend the Agricultural Course at Emerson for six months. Gai and Jors are both apprentices and a third will be joining later.

Lastly, I must tell you about some changes in our Management Group. Brian Infield has just stepped down and retired from the group after being chairman for something like 10 years. He is now in his eighties and has done a tremendous job over this time. He has been a very good chairman and has given hours of time and effort towards helping the farm get to where it is today. He has, of course, a great business sense, which has been extremely valuable. Not only that though, like other members of our past and present Management Group, he has really cared for and carried the consciousness of the farm and all of us working on it. Thank you.

I would also like to say thank you to Chris Marshall, who also recently stepped down from the group as a result of his work load when taking on his post at Michael Hall. Thanks too, to Mark Collier. Mark has also been a Management Group member for a number of years and stopped a while ago when his circumstances changed and he moved away from his house at Holtye. The farm still uses his land at Chiddingstone Hoath, which the farm is very happy about and which is ever improving. Happily Neil Ravenscroft has taken over the chairmanship of the group and we will take in some new members over the next weeks and months.

Peter Brown

Learning on the Land Update

Good news and not so good for our school farm project. Emerson College has finally decided that they cannot lease their building to us for the project, as they now envisage needing it for their own teaching space. We are not giving up though! We are now looking at the feasibility of putting up a building on Tablehurst Farm for the project. This might take a little longer to come to fruition, but the good news is that we have now obtained over £80,000 of funding pledges towards the project, and enough immediate funding to keep our fund-raising team going. Watch this space!

Apple Concert!

A special concert at Michael Hall to celebrate the apples.

A walk in the garden followed by music, apple juice and apple cake.

13 September 6.00pm



Barn Dance
Tablehurst Farm
Friday 4th July

Emerson College is seeking a head gardener. For more information, contact Arjen Huese on 07787 792829

ahuese@gmail.com

Wildlife Walks with Tom Forward

Forest at Twilight – 29 June 8.30pm

The aim of this walk is to catch up with some of the fascinating denizens of the Heathland such as the Nightjar and Woodcock whose song and display flights can only be witnessed after the sun has set. This is a very special experience and is often complemented by other forest creatures coming out into the open under the cover of dusk. If the weather is wet this event will not go ahead. Call Tom on 07877 574 554 on the day if in doubt. Free event. Donations welcome. Meet at the Ashdown Forest Visitor Centre.

Tablehurst Wildlife – 3 August 10.00am

As a follow on from the spring walk this event will be looking at the changes that have taken place in the birdlife on the farm since Spring and consider the farms other wildlife inhabitants too. It will involve a walk around the farm looking at different habitat types and also thoughts on how wildlife can be an important and valuable feature of the farm landscape. This will be followed by light refreshments. Free event. Donations towards the Farmhouse Appeal or the Learning on the Land project welcomed. Meet at the shop.

Lunchtime special!

Barbecue at Tablehurst

Every Saturday lunchtime

Throughout the summer

11.30am – 2.00pm

Co-op AGM

Small Village Hall

Forest Row

19 September 2008

8.00pm



For contact details and to apply to join the Co-op please go to
www.tablehurstandplawhatch.co.uk