



WHITE CLIFFS COUNTRYSIDE PROJECT



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The French Connection

*Nature Conservation activities along the French coastline
between Calais and Boulogne*

THE WHITE CLIFFS COUNTRYSIDE PROJECT is twinned with a French project called CAPS 1993 and which cares for the coastline and countryside between Calais and Boulogne, part of the Pas de Calais area.

The two projects have a number of tasks in common. They both manage ancient chalk grassland for its nature conservation value and as an open space for recreation. Both continue to improve the network of footpaths and improve countryside access by installing waymarking, steps and leading guided walks and both also provide outdoor information panels and leaflets explaining the points of interest of their various sites. Working together both projects aim to encourage walking and exploring of the natural sites on either side of the Channel.

Last year the WCCP won the Folkestone Town Mayor's Award, a prize donated by Sealink Stena, and on 5th July, taking advantage of that prize a minibus full of staff and volunteers from the WCCP went over to visit the French Project sites. We were met by two staff members, Emmanuel Legrix and Dominique Derout, who gave us an extremely interesting tour of their nature reserves.

We visited the land around Cap Blanc Nez, a chalk cliff-top not unlike Langdon Cliffs or the cliffs at St. Margaret's Bay. Cap Blanc Nez also has a monument in memory of the Dover Patrol, at a high view-point overlooking the sea and with ample parking. Its aspect reminds me of Land's End, with the sea to the north and the sun over the sea to the west. The task of managing the chalk grassland, landscape and visitors is similar to that of the Dover and Folkestone sites, with similar problems of controlling litter and car parking, preventing erosion and managing the chalk turf to improve its wildlife value.

We visited the scrubby hillside called Motte de Bourg, overlooking wetlands where the 12th century port of Wissant used to be. A wide variety of bird life can be seen there, and viewing platforms and hides have been erected for ornithologists. We had the luck to spot Marsh Harriers hunting over the reed beds and two volunteers spotted a Golden Oriole, a beautiful yellow bird. Both are quite rare in Britain. Another volunteer spotted a Natterjack toad, also a rarity in Britain.

We walked along the cliff top around Cap Gris Nez, looking at the waymarking, outdoor information panels and the general management of the area. At present motor vehicles can drive right up to the cliff edge next to the café. The French project team hopes to make people walk a short distance from a car park that is hidden behind the lighthouse. Then they can repair the erosion and make the cliff seem more wild. They also hope to remove the café.

We were particularly interested in comparing how the two projects operate. The WCCP currently has three full-time staff with two rangers shortly joining the team. We have about 100 volunteer wardens and about the same number of active volunteers, plus local school groups who come out and help with management of the countryside around Dover and Folkestone.

The French project, which is part of Espace Natural Regional, has fourteen full-time wardens for the area between Calais and Boulogne, supported by many office staff. The French group is funded by central and local government and does not have to rely on volunteers to the same extent as does the WCCP.

We are hoping to increase the number of volunteer exchanges and to continue to have English and French volunteers working on both sides of the Channel. On Saturday, 24th October a team of eleven English volunteers will be going over to work with the French team on voluntary conservation work on one of their reserves.

Both projects want to increase the number of leisure activities on offer to local people and tourists, on either side of the Channel. For example, as I write Kirk Alexander and a member of the CAPS 1993 team are leading a group of thirty English cyclists along the coastal roads from Calais to Boulogne. This event is part of the Canterbury Festival.

We have produced a joint leaflet, advertising the wild places to visit on both sides of the Channel, and hope to arrange regular exchange visits.

If anybody reading this feels that their business or organisation could sponsor our exchange working visits to the French Project please contact us at the office. We would be keen to discuss our ideas with you.

Finally, we have an interesting and active winter programme of volunteer tasks and guided walks. If you would like our latest programme please contact the WCCP at 6 Cambridge Terrace, Dover for your free copy.

The WCCP gratefully acknowledges the sponsorship of:
 Dover District Council, Eurotunnel, Kent County Council, English Heritage, Shepway District Council, English Nature, The Countryside Commission, Network SouthEast and the Kent Trust for Nature Conservation. cont.