



WHITE CLIFFS COUNTRYSIDE
PROJECT

My Work as a VOLUNTEER WARDEN for WHINLESS DOWN

~ R. Doble ~

MY INVOLVEMENT with the White Cliffs Countryside Project began in February 1997. I have been a Volunteer Warden for Whinless Down for about 18 months and it is my particular responsibility to monitor the butterflies.

I have been a single parent for two years, with my two little boys living with me. My life was fulfilled as a father and in my career as a musician, but I had a lot of time on my hands during the day. Having found a leaflet in my local library I decided I would join one of the WCCP walks and find out if I could learn a little more about the countryside in my area.

I have always been interested in the countryside and its ecology and enjoyed walking in my immediate countryside in Kent. Having grown up in Tower Hamlets, Dover, I have been familiar with Whinless Down since I was a little boy. As youngsters it was our wilderness playground - placed as it is en route to Poulton Woods.

I joined a WCCP guided walk one day, and met the leader Paul Holt. I enjoyed both his company and that of the other people on the walk. At the end of the morning's walk I chatted to Paul and expressed my fascination about all things involved with local nature.

It was over a period of several encounters with Paul and other WCCP leaders that Paul offered me the opportunity to study in detail the area on my doorstep.

Whinless Down, an area of unimproved chalk grassland, had been managed by the WCCP for a period of time using local Dexter cattle and with

clearance of scrub by its many volunteers. They are attempting to improve the habitat for wild flowers, butterflies and other insects particular to the rare chalk grassland.

The land had been allowed to grow wild and unmanaged for many years prior to the WCCP starting work. They needed a means of monitoring the success of their initiatives - and this is where I come in.

A good means of indicating the health of chalk grassland is by the number of butterflies and the number of individual species that visit it. Paul introduced me to a tried and tested scientific method for collating the butterflies visiting the area. Having established initial data, continuing this survey over a number of years, would hopefully clearly show that the management regime was helping to improve the health of the grassland. Butterfly figures also indicate the variety and number of chalk grassland flowers used by the insects for both their eggs, pupae, caterpillar and adult stages.

I was taught how to walk a set route, taking me approximately an hour. The route was divided into areas of different habitat, indicated by numbers on a chart. I learnt how to identify most of the major species of butterflies, although this was a slow, laborious task. A butterfly 'in flight', or even momentarily feeding on a plant, does not present a perfect view as seen on a page of an identification guide.

The first year was frustrating. I made mistakes and I was not satisfied with the results at the end of the year. However, this year, my observation skills have

really improved. I find that I can instinctively identify butterflies (the Blues are particularly tricky at first). I have learnt a lot about wild flowers and have become fascinated by the various aspects of the weather.

As a boy, I spent many days on Whinless Down and now I still spend many hours on the hill, and I find it quite a romantic notion that - after all these years - I hold some responsibility for its well being.

Officially, I am a Volunteer Warden for Whinless Down and I am very proud to be involved in a project and study that I hope I can continue for many more years.

FOOTNOTE: The WCCP are always keen to hear from other people who would like to be volunteers and/or voluntary wardens for the sites WCCP manage. The kind work of volunteers and voluntary wardens greatly increases the works of the WCCP. The WCCP would like to thank all the Voluntary Wardens who

keep a watchful, caring eye on the sites.

Please contact Melanie Wrigley, White Cliffs Countryside Project, 6 Cambridge Terrace, Dover, Kent CT1G 1JT or telephone/fax: 01304 241806.

Coastal Landscapes Festival and the Winter guided walks programme.

The White Cliffs Countryside Project provided a range of events to celebrate the Coastal Landscapes Festival. The Green Gang 'family activities for school holidays' created an impressive, temporary 'Hillside Sculpture' of the Coastal Landscapes Festival logo for the start of the Festival and the grand finale for the festival was the Pumpkin Parade and Fire Sculpture at Kearsney Abbey on Saturday 31st October.

The Winter Guided Walks Programme is available direct from the White Cliffs Countryside Project, or from libraries, museums or Tourist Information Centres. We look forward to seeing you out on a winter walk sometime.

Emmaus Update

TERRY SUTTON

Companions at St. Martin's Emmaus at Archcliffe Fort have been busy helping local craftsmen convert an old Victorian barrack block in the complex into flats. So far a dozen have been provided. The aim is to provide comfortable homes for 25 Companions.

Fund raising continues and the latest update (October) shows that more than £432,000 has been collected since the trustees launched an appeal three years ago.

The shop at Archcliffe Fort - well worth a visit - continues to trade well with average takings around £100 a day. To boost income the trustees are looking at the possibility of opening another shop in a neighbouring town.

St Martin's Emmaus has received support from The Dover Society, which is greatly appreciated, and if any members have household or other items they can donate for sale, please give us a ring on Dover (01304) 204550 and Companions will collect.

Footnote:

Terry Waite, the new president of Emmaus UK, visited the centre at Archcliffe Fort in November.