

The Western Heights Preservation Society

report from Chris Taft

OPEN WEEKEND AT THE WESTERN HEIGHTS Saturday 9th and Sunday 10th June 2007

Now a regular feature that attracts large crowds eager to join in the fun, the annual open weekend, managed jointly by The Western Heights Preservation Society (WHPS) and the White Cliffs Countryside Project (WCCP), helps bring the history of a very important fortress to life. The Heights are a series of forts linked by miles of ditches on the western hilltop above Dover. Construction began during the American War of Independence, continued during the Napoleonic Wars and resulted in one of the most important and impressive forts in Britain, and indeed Europe. Much remains closed to the public but the open weekend allows rare access to some of the more spectacular parts of the fortifications.

The whole weekend will be packed with events and activities for all with, on the Sunday, lots of extra events, stalls and displays from amongst others, nature conservation groups, English Heritage, local groups and organisations and period re-enactors. Refreshments will be available and experts on hand to answer questions.

On both days the Grand Shaft, an impressive 19th century triple staircase, will be free of charge and parts of the Drop Redoubt will be open, with a small charge being made for entry. All money taken helps to preserve the fort and allow future access. The most impressive is the Drop Redoubt, a self-contained gun platform with vast rooms, casemates and barrack accommodation, which was used from the Napoleonic wars to the Second World War. Chris Taft (WHPS) comments that the Drop Redoubt with its sheer size is fantastic and the views from the top are simply a must. This, with the rest of the events during the weekend, means there really will be something for everyone.

Visitors are reminded that this is a historic fortress opened especially for this event. Physical access to the fort is not possible by wheelchair users or people with prams or push chairs. There is, however, plenty to see and do on the Sunday. Appropriate footwear is recommended for anyone visiting the Drop Redoubt or Grand Shaft.





Situated on Military Hill, Dover, just off the A20 above the Western Docks, the Sunday events will take place at the former barracks just below the Redoubt. Limited parking will be available close by; alternatively visitors could park in the town and ascend to the site via the more traditional method - up the 140 steps of the Grand Shaft.

The WHPS who will be funding and managing the open weekend are a volunteer-run Society set up seven years ago to help promote, preserve and make the Western Heights accessible. They are grateful to English Heritage for permission to open the Drop Redoubt site and to Dover District Council for opening the Grand Shaft.

There are plans for a talk, on a related subject, to take place on the Saturday evening in Dover, with many more activities and plans being worked on. For more information see below.

APPEAL FOR MARSHALS FOR THE OPEN WEEKEND

To make this weekend happen we need a team of volunteer marshals, whose principal duties will be to ensure the safety of the visitors. Full instruction will be given. There is no need to be an expert on the history of the site as experts will be on hand if required. If you would like to be involved see address below.

WORK DAYS

After the post-open day lull in which the committee has taken a well-earned break, we are now busy preparing for the open weekend. Work is continuing in earnest and the site of the latrine block is slowly being cleared. Following the successful opening up of the Staff Sergeants' Quarters, it is hoped that this work will help interpret the site further.

Two of our members have been training in the use of herbicides on the site, which will allow us to be more active on the weed-killing front, as the plants are already trying to take over the paths again.

English Heritage has requested that we restrict access to the Caponiers throughout the winter months. As it is a bat hibernation site, we are legally bound to avoid disturbance during the period November to March and could be subject to fines if we knowingly disturb the creatures.

GETTING INVOLVED

The WHPS is actively seeking to expand and develop its committee; the work need not be strenuous and is very rewarding. If you would like to get involved please contact us at the address below.

CONTACT US

More information can be found on the group's website at www.dover-western-heights.org

or by e-mail to

publicity@dover-western-heights.org

or by writing to

WHPS Pox 366 DEAL Kent CT14 9XY