

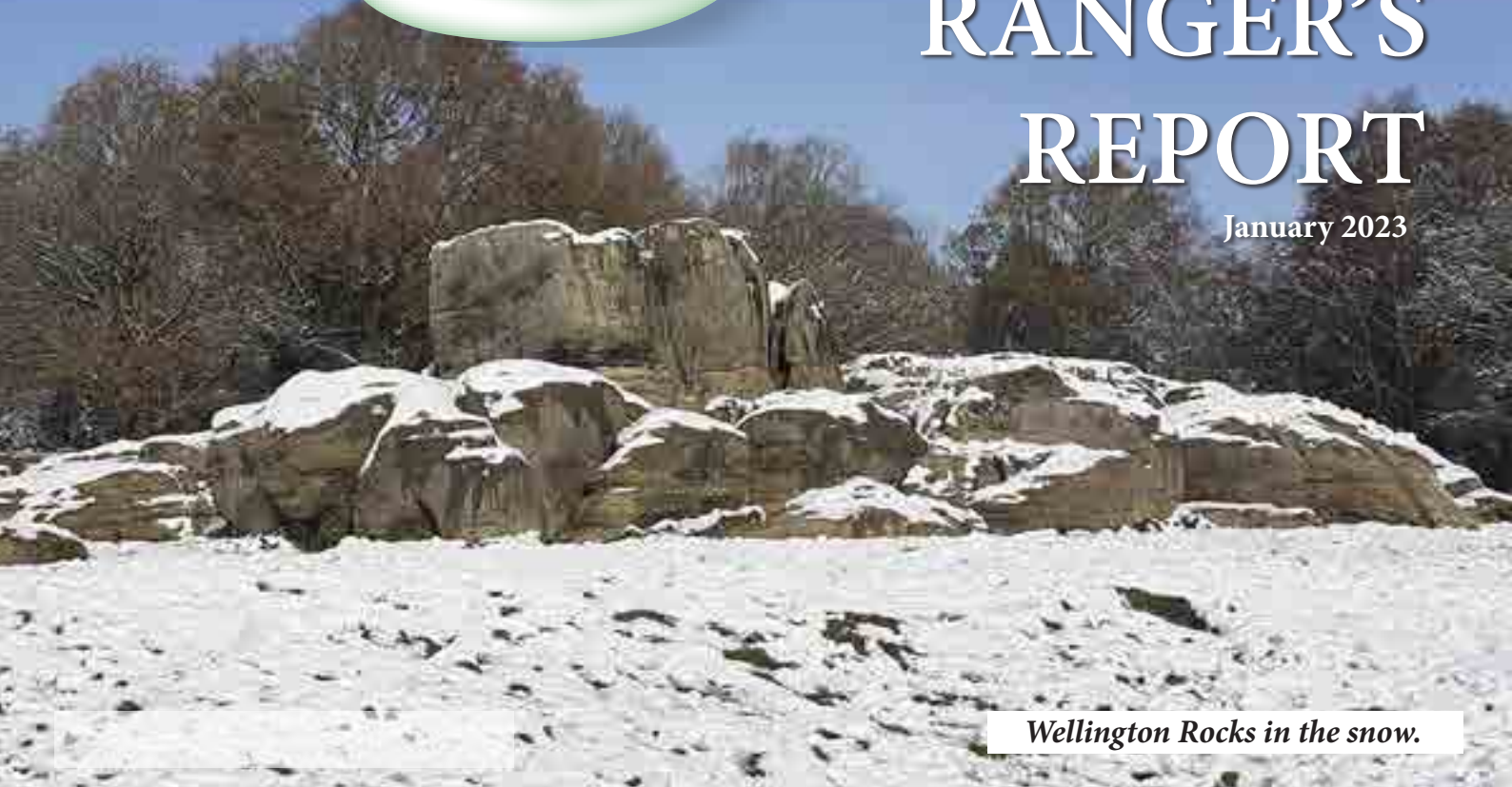


COMMON GROUND

Registered Charity No. 1013975

THE RANGER'S REPORT

January 2023



Wellington Rocks in the snow.

Winter has been absolutely beautiful on the Commons. The snow, ice and frost made the rocks, trees and ponds look exquisite from time to time and I have enjoyed watching the dogs and birds scurrying about so very much! It has also been very wet, perhaps a bit too wet for my liking. Cold I can deal with, but like most of us, I am much less impressed by too much rain. I read that back and realise I sound rather like Eeyore... ho hum.

The winter so far has I'm afraid been very much mostly about trees and tree safety. The drought of the summer really did put many of our trees under severe stress and I am afraid it took its toll yet again on our Ash trees. That combined with rain saturated ground has accelerated the decline of many ash trees due to ash die-back and the associated secondary 'illnesses'. We have prioritised where the trees need to be removed for safety and are now

working against a programme of works to do this in a systematic and timely fashion. In some places this will look quite drastic but it should be said that nature will always bounce back. In many ways the benefits of reducing the ash canopy, especially in Rusthall where there are a great number of ash along the roads, is a bonus for biodiversity. Roadsides are the perfect place for butterflies and other pollinators and Rusthall Common really is not short of trees.

Friends of The Earth are also providing trees to replace some of the lost ash and this will be done very carefully and sympathetically. We will therefore have many more species of tree and this will in turn attract more species of birds and insects as they seek out their niche foods and preferred habitats.

No. 87
JANUARY 2023

The Society founded for '... the conservation, maintenance, preservation and peaceful enjoyment for the benefit of the public of the Commons by such means as the Society in consultation with the Conservators for the Commons thinks fit'.

I am very excited to say that we have a number of environmental projects to undertake this year. These are all courtesy of the Friends of the Commons and The Freehold Tenants. We will soon provide some information about each of these on our website so that you can see what we are doing and why. Some of the projects will take place this winter 2022/23, and others will take place in autumn 2023. All of them are designed to make the commons even more beautiful to our human and 'wild' visitors.

One exciting project that is being funded by other donors is a proposed all-weather path along the top of Happy Valley. This is a great idea and since my arrival in June we have been looking at, and considering the best options for how we can achieve this in a way that will make as many people as possible able to access this spectacular area all year round. Speaking as a Ranger and Ecologist, I feel that it is very important to put in place the 'right' kind of path. It needs to be very sympathetic to the wonderful existing character and the ecology of the area. The first section from St Pauls to the central bench is already pathed and to improve this up to and including the bench will be fairly

straight forward. The stretch from the central bench to Tea Garden Lane is another matter though. This is because the topography and character here are already very much enjoyed by many. Observing where the wet areas are and where the leaf litter collects and turns to mud has been very important and watching these dynamics will continue to inform what options we decide to take going forward. I am pleased to say that I feel sure that we can make this path much more user friendly for the less able with minimum intervention over the course of 2023.

Finally, once again I want to extend special thanks to all the volunteers who so kindly and generously give up their time to help us maintain and improve the commons for everyone. I want to thank not only those who join our organised groups, but those unsung heroes who go about the Commons picking up litter on their own. Thank you so very much!

Dan Colborne



NOTES FROM THE CHAIRMAN

JANUARY 2023 - WITH CLIVE EVANS

A very happy and healthy New Year to all our members and their families.

We held a very successful Lunch at The Spa Hotel in November, and there were 85 members and friends in attendance.

I can inform you that the Marlpit path has now been completed, one of our many projects of 2022.

Wild Child (Forest Schools) will take place in April during the school holidays, And Kent High Weald with volunteers will deliver it. The cost will be £1500, and we hope to get this funded, plus a contribution from Targetfollow. The dates are Tuesday 4th April, and Wednesday 5th April (Details of the locations will be announced at a later date).

We also purchased a display cabinet to show finds from the archaeological dig at The Rusthall Spring Site. The cabinet

will be housed in The Rusthall Library in February, and part funding came from the now disbanded Rusthall Historical Society.

High Vis vests are also being purchased with our logo and website address on for our wonderful team of litter pickers and clearance volunteers.

Details of work parties and events can be found on; www.friendstothecommons.org and www.twcommons.org

Finally your Committee will meet on 29th January, and will agree on which projects to fund in 2023.

Thank you for your continued support.
Best wishes, Clive Evans.

Your Commons Needs You

The current Management Plan was adopted by the Conservators in March 2017. There is a pressing need for a more relevant, defined, and workable plan to take the Commons forward for the next five years.

At present there is a severe shortage of ecological survey data to assist in the planning of future projects and management of the Commons. Survey results will help with decisions on what the overall management objectives should be, which habitats are in good condition and which need work to enhance them.

The Friends would like to contribute and help fund several important biological surveys as well as the new management plan. The project is expected to cost around £20,000, but we need your help.

If you are able to make a donation. Please make a bank transfer to our **NatWest account - sort code: 55-70-13, account number: 01028774** or send a cheque payable to "**Friends of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons**" **Donald Clarke 2, Molyneux Park Road, Tunbridge Wells TN4 8DN**. Contact Donald Clarke, drc.scc1897@gmail.com.

Thankyou
Clive Evans

The Friends Officers & Committee Membership 2023

Officers:			Committee:	
Chairman:	Clive Evans	Tel: 01892 518975	Dr Ian Beavis	Tel: 01892 523007
Treasurer:	Donald Clarke	Tel: 01892 615306	Clive McAllister	Tel: 01892 532817
Deputy Chairman & Mem. Secretary:	Chris Gurr	Tel: 01892 542408	Peter Miall	Tel: 01892 517599
Secretary:	Tony Pawson	email.akpawson@hotmail.com	Joy Podbury	email.joypodbury@talktalk.net
Social Secretary:	Terry Coulthard	Tel: 01892 548785		

*****X*****

Friends of the Commons MEMBERSHIP - DETAILS 2023

Data protection rules require us to check the information we store on our database is accurate and up-to-date. Please send the following information to Joy Podbury, The Coach House, Royal Chase, TN4 8AY joypodbury@talktalk.net Many thanks

Title Mr Mrs Miss Ms. - Please circle as appropriate Other:

Surname.....

First Name.....

Address:

Postcode

Tel No..... Mobile

Email address

**Please delete as appropriate* "I confirm that my subscription *continues to / *does not qualify for Gift Aid."

*****X*****

WANTED VOLUNTEERS! Could this be you?

We have a vacancy on the Committee for someone to help promote the Friends of the Common. We are looking for a volunteer to take on the role of Community Engagement. *The primary function is to develop a social media presence and from time to time help to coordinate activities on and in support of the commons.*

Contact Clive Evans, evans_paddy@hotmail.com



FINALLY, ALONG WITH DAN, VOLUNTEERS COULD LIFT A SECTION OF THE RAILINGS AND CLEAR AROUND TOAD ROCK

LENDING A HELPING HAND

One way the Friends of the Commons and the Commons Conservators engages with local communities is through a variety of volunteer opportunities, which help to conserve and enhance the natural beauty and special qualities of the Commons.

Volunteers play an essential role in helping to protect and improve the Commons for people to enjoy, and wildlife to thrive. By volunteering their time, they enable important work to be carried out, including litter-picking, clearance of invasive species, pond, and rock clearance, or assisting the archelogy team.

The volunteers themselves also reap the rewards of spending time outside. In addition to the physical benefits of being active, it is a brilliant way to boost wellbeing and

mental health through socialising, and the satisfaction of making a real difference to the local environment.

If you'd be interested in joining one of our groups, there are regular parties organised by Gemma Stapeley, the Clerk of the Commons' Conservators to pick up litter and assist with other clearances. Any equipment is provided.

Just email Gemma gemma.stapeley@twcommons.org, and ask to receive her regular emails on the working parties. Other members help deliver our newsletters, take on administrative roles or help organise our social events if you are interested in any of these roles contact our Chairman, Clive Evans evans_paddy@hotmail.com

Be a friend to the Commons



Eighty-five members of The Friends of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons gathered at the Spa Hotel and enjoyed a delicious lunch. Social Secretary, Terry Coulthard said it was lovely to see so many familiar and new faces.

The Friends of the Commons are a registered charity helping to look after the Commons for the benefit of wildlife and the community. It is particularly beneficial to us Rusthall residents, providing walks and greenery on our doorstep. So do join the Friends- it's only £10 per year - and help to preserve this wonderful asset. Take a look at the new website: <https://www.friendstothecommons.org> where more photos are available, together with walks, information and joining directions.

WILD CHILD 2023

TUESDAY 4TH AND WEDNESDAY 5TH APRIL

(Details of locations to be given soon).

The much loved WildChild forest school sessions will be returning to Tunbridge Wells & Rusthall Commons during the school Easter holidays. The fantastic, free, drop-in sessions will be jam-packed with activities laid on by Kent High Weald Partnership forest school team, guaranteed to engage and delight the young and young at heart.

This will be the first year the event hasn't been superbly managed by Lynne Lane, who stepped down from the Committee last year, so we are looking for volunteers to help with the pre-organisation and on the day. If you think you could spare a bit of time, we'd love to hear from you, so please do drop an email to , gemma.stapeley@twcommons.org

Kind regards,
Gemma Stapeley
Clerk to the Tunbridge Wells Commons Conservators
07766553604



Please check the website friendstothecommons.org for links to Events/Wild Child/volunteering.



Tunbridge Wells Common Kent

Orienteering League Event 4.

On Saturday the 17th of December an orienteering event took place on Tunbridge Wells Common, it was stage 4 of a competition comprising of several stages, taking place around Kent and Sussex from September – May each year. The event centre was located up at The Linden Park Cricket ground.

When agreeing to organise this event I had never visited the common. However, I soon found out when planning the courses, it is a very nice space in the middle of Tunbridge Wells for the locals and the sheer numbers using it every day is a testament to that. It is a very tight and compact space, and it was a challenge to squeeze in the distance on the longest course and provide an appropriate orienteering challenge for the more experienced runners, but the common has some nice features that provided good control points.

The day of the event turned out to be a great winter's day for orienteering on the common, which served up a nice bleak sunshine over the cricket ground completely covered in snow.

Just under 70 entrants turned up on the day, with a mixture from very experienced orienteers to participants trying orienteering for the first time, and from the feedback most seemed to have enjoyed the challenges of the common, as there was plenty of tired but happy faces on show at the finish.

For anyone who wishes to find out more about orienteering, you can visit our website on Saxons Orienteering Club (saxons-oc.org) to find out more.

Thank you very much for allowing us to use the common for our event.
Peter Lilja – planner & organiser



TUNBRIDGE WELLS DIAMONDS

The rocks on Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons have always been admired by tourists as the most striking natural features of the town, but they also had practical uses. Up to the early 20th century the Commons were a working landscape, and local people used them a source of natural products including stone (quarried mainly from the Bull's Hollow area at Rusthall) and sand. John Clifford's early 19th century visitor guide describes how the 'caves' under St Helena Cottage, now below ground but formerly open at road level, were a source of high quality white sand 'of a delicate fineness and... in such request for household purposes that poor persons gain considerably by collecting it'. He reports how sadly 'several lives have been lost through the falling of various pieces of the rock from incautiously digging too far in'.

More unexpected is the long forgotten industry of collecting and working 'Tunbridge Wells Diamonds'. The rocks on the Commons were laid down as freshwater deposits in the early Cretaceous period around 136 million years ago. If you look closely at Wellington Rocks on Tunbridge Wells Common, you can see beds of tiny pebbles deposited in successive layers within the outcrops. These constantly weather out of the rock and can be picked out of the loose sand

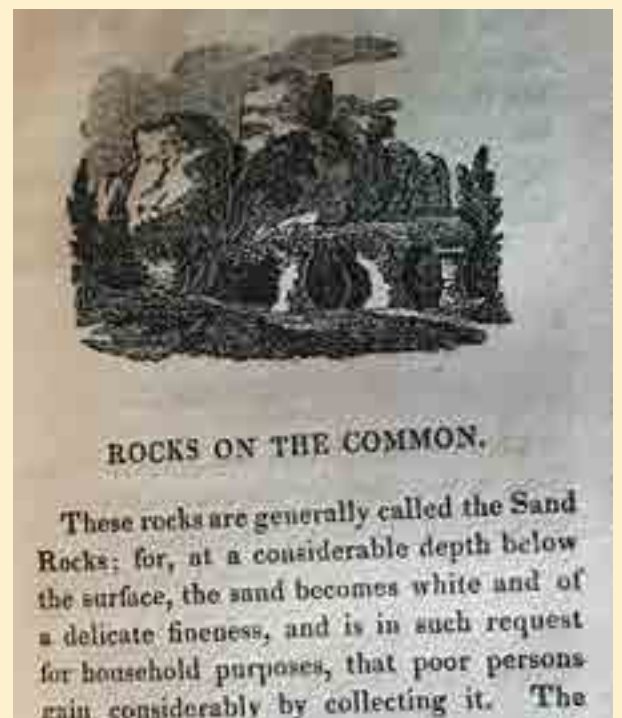


TUNBRIDGE WELLS DIAMONDS

at the foot of the rocks or nearby open areas such as the sand-pit that so many solitary bees use as a nest site. Most are white, but others are clear like rock crystal or tinted with pink, yellow or amber. I remember picking them up as a child and thinking they were interesting, but with no idea of their historical significance.

John Colbran's 'New Guide for Tunbridge Wells', first published in 1839, gives the most detailed account of Tunbridge Wells Diamonds. He describes them as being 'found upon the several paths leading to the common, especially after rain', saying enthusiastically that they 'partake of the Nova Mina of Brazil exactly in quality'. These Brazilian gems were a highly prized colourless form of topaz, reckoned to be the nearest thing to a diamond in brilliance. 'These crystals', Colbran tells his readers, 'are extremely brilliant, and are introduced into rings, brooches, and other ornamental articles of jewellery'.

T r a d e advertisements give us a few more details. In a later edition of Colbran's guide, 'working lapidary' G F Couch claims to be the only person working



JOHN CLIFFORD'S GUIDE 1826



PEBBLE BEDS AT WELLINGTON ROCKS

these stones and invites 'ladies and gentlemen wishing to see the process of cutting and setting the Tunbridge Wells Diamonds' to visit his premises. He also claims royal patronage for his products. However, there is evidence that other local jewellers were selling items using these gems. So what happened to them all? There are no references beyond 1870, and I'm not aware that any museum has examples.

Ian Beavis