

Project News

Autumn 2009

Penllergare Valley Woods

No. 5

As reported below, these are exciting times! Having landed major contracts from the Big Lottery and Forestry Commission Wales, it was extremely satisfying when, after monumental hard work, we achieved a treble with the HLF. The Trust has battled for ten years to get this restoration project off the ground and for once there is guarded optimism in the air. All we can say is – watch this space!

Heritage Lottery Success

As a result of intensive research and preparation (see www.penllergare.org Project page for a summary) the Penllergare Valley Woods project has been awarded a first-round pass by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) under its 'Parks for People' programme.

Our aim is to conserve and improve specified historic structures and parts of the landscape, improve access and knowledge of Valley Woods, involve volunteers more widely, as well improve our capabilities in learning, training, management and upkeep.

The first-round pass means that HLF believes we have the potential to deliver high-quality benefits and value for Lottery money. So far this has been the only award in Wales and the only non-local authority project in Britain! We have until Summer 2010 to carry out further surveys and work up detailed plans to support our second-round application, which has to mesh in with the existing Community Engagement and Education (C2E) and woodlands regeneration projects.

The current grant is up to £221,300 for these development operations, but – if successful at the second-round - a further grant of up to £1,949,200 could be available for a budget totalling £3,359,000 over about three years. However the balance of the eligible costs must be raised by the Trust and this is no easy task in the present state of the economy!

From mid-February to mid-March next year there will be a series of public consultations, giving people an opportunity to comment on the plans, and for the Trust to thank everybody for their support through the National Lottery and other fund-raising measures. Details will be sent out later and will also be publicised in the press.

Relieve for Penllergare's Observatory?

In the Summer issue we described the plight of the Observatory, encased in a steel cage and hung about with 'Danger – Keep Out' signs and we urged readers to voice their concern to Swansea Council, the custodians of this important fragment of Penllergare's history.

An encouraging number of you did so although, other than some pruning back of overhanging branches, nothing much seems to have happened as a result. However, behind the scenes, the outlook is more promising. The Council has confirmed its commitment to safeguarding the structure, Cadw - Welsh Historic Monuments has offered a repair grant and with the hoped-for benefit of the HLF grant (see above), the Penllergare Trust has reiterated its offer to help with the repair, upkeep and interpretation of the structure, on condition that visitors can have access to the interior.

Heavens Above!

Even so, and despite this being the International Year of Astronomy, one gets the regrettable impression that Swansea Council does not 'do' space. At the time when the future of the Observatory on the Marina is in question and the hard work of the Swansea Astronomical Society over the years (particularly in education) goes for nothing, we at Penllergare aim to redress the balance. Through our partnership with Astro-Cymru, two astronomical workshops have been given recently to local schools and next January we are launching a 'virtual observatory' via our website to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of John Dillwyn Llewelyn.

Work in the Valley

The Woodsmen team finished their summer contract of 'cleaning and respacing' the riverside woodlands and have spent the last few weeks clearing overgrowth around the waterfall, revealing contours and vistas that have not been seen for decades. The sluice arches on the east side, that were used to divert the river from the waterfall in order to drain down the lake, are now clearly visible. The Thursday volunteer group (together with the Saturday band in September) worked hard during the summer clearing brash, removing debris from the river and rebuilding one of the weirs. Small groups from secondary schools and local youth organisations have also contributed. Meanwhile a survey by the Environment Agency revealed a most encouraging diversity of fish and invertebrates in the river. Despite the rainy summer that hampered the clearance of bracken (as it did last year) it is hoped to plant upwards of 10 hectares of broadleaf trees this season, mostly on the Nydfwch bank where Colonel John Llewelyn (the grandfather of John Dillwyn Llewelyn) had established the first plantations in 1805.

Community & Education

It was a busy term up to the summer holiday with primary school visits. As well as our usual programme for 10 and 11 year olds (Years 5 & 6) we also introduced infant classes (Years 1 & 2) to the woods. This was greatly enjoyed, judging by the beaming faces that boarded the return coach, even though little legs were rather tired!

The Picture Penllergare Art Competition – sponsored by Forestry Commission Wales – was again of very high standard and won by Ellen Wright of Penllergaer Primary School. Her photographic collage can be seen on www.penllergare.blogspot.com and all the winners from the six participating schools are now on www.penllergare.org Education Programme/Art Gallery

Three holiday Adventure Days for 8 to 11 year olds were held during August at River Camp and a fourth at half-term. Bookings are already coming in for next year!

The autumn term started with visits from Pontlliw, Blaenymaes and Portmead Primary Schools, plus another Astro-Cymru workshop and the first of our OCN accreditation programmes in Conservation Skills for 14 to 16 year olds from a local secondary school.

Stepping Out – Walking for Health & Well-Being continues every Monday at 12.30 p.m. for approximately an hour, with walkers meeting at the kissing-gate on the Penllergaer council office car park; while illustrated talks about Penllergare to groups and organisations continue throughout the year.

There was a staff change in November when Joe Middleton left to take up a managerial post with the Avon Wildlife Trust and we welcomed Benesek Monk as our new Volunteer & Training Co-ordinator (ben.monk@penllergare.org). Ben (his full name, Benesek, is Cornish) worked in Swansea for a number of years before moving to Latvia, but he is now pleased to be back in his former stamping ground!

The Friends of Penllergare Valley Woods

The Friends have now completed their second year programme of talks and activities, during which time we have welcomed a number of new members. The trip to Aberglasney was a great success, the talks were well attended and with some excellent speakers, the walks were invigorating, the picnic was a wash-out (again!) and the year ended on a high note with the enchanting *An Evening with Amy Dillwyn* – a dramatic presentation by the actor Debra John. She has promised us a second visit in 2011. Don't miss it!

A pilot scheme to sell firewood from Valley Woods has started. The current stock is mostly of larch and it is well-seasoned. All profits go to support the project. Enquiries to Ray Butt on 01792 297431.

For further information on any of these items please get in touch

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