

who told there were, at that time, 16 local members of Kent Greeters and that there were an increasing number of requests from cruise passengers arriving at Dover who had been able to give 14 days notice of their arrival at the port. She added more local Greeters were needed

because they had to bring other members to Dover from Deal and Sandwich to cope with the number of requests.

\* More information about Kent Greeters can be obtained on [www.kentgreeters.co.uk](http://www.kentgreeters.co.uk)

## — 2nd Talk —

### White Cliffs Countryside Partnership

A talk by Melanie Wrigley reported by Alan Lee

For the second talk of the evening Melanie outlined how the WCCP came into being in 1989, originally for three years, with three staff and seven funding sponsors.

Now it has grown to thirteen staff and thirty funding organizations. It has changed its name to 'Partnership' instead of 'Project' to

reflect its changing role in managing green spaces in the White Cliffs area.

The Heritage Coast stretches from Dover to Folkestone and Dover to Kingsdown and includes areas of beautiful landscape. These are the nearest Heritage Coast areas to London and have the richest biodiversity of chalk downland anywhere.



*Dexters grazing on St Martin's Battery Field*



*Dover cliffs. Photograph by Alan Lee*

The chalk cliffs are eroded in a different way at Dover from those at Folkestone. Here the chalk sits on gaunt clay with its junction below sea level. This results in large falls of chalk from the cliffs. At Folkestone the chalk joins the clay at sea level. From the 1850's pebbles from the Warren have swept round the coast to Dover and beyond.

Old post cards of Warren Bay show little islands of chalk, which have now been eroded away. Fossils found in Warren Bay are so good and consistent that they are used to date the age of sediments from around the world.

The WCCP qualifies for Interreg funding because it is twinned with two French regions, Cap Gris-Nez being one.

The Western Heights Nature Reserve consists of 200 acres of chalk land around the Western Heights. All chalk

grassland needs to be grazed by cattle or horses; this is why they have been introduced into the area. This has resulted in a vast improvement in the numbers of plants and wildlife seen.

Dover and Shepway contain more than half of the chalk grassland in Kent, more than 2% of Britain's or about 1% of the world's.

Chalk consists of 300 types of plankton and 1 cm of chalk takes 100,000 years to form. It is a little known fact that plankton produce more oxygen in the sea than that produced from all of the world's trees. We should therefore ensure that we protect the seas of the world.

Our ancestors were good naturalists as they had to observe nature closely in order to survive. Herbal medicines evolved through the observation of animals eating plants to cure themselves.



*Cowslips at St Martin's Battery*



*Pale Bee Orchid*



*Early Spider Orchid*

A great many of the plants on the Western Heights have medicinal properties. Cowslips used for wine making and as a painkiller grow around St Martin's Battery. Before Victorian times they were known as the Cow Slop.

The word orchid derives from the Greek orchis (testis) because of the similarity of their tubers with a mammalian testis. In ancient Greece orchids were attributed curative and aphrodisiac properties. There are six different types on the Heights, including the Bee Orchid.

Horseshoe vetch is abundant on the Heights and is essential to the Adonis Blue butterfly as the female only lays its eggs on this plant. Ten years ago the Adonis Blue was on the endangered list but thanks to successful management of its habitat by 2009 it was removed from the list. Red Meadow ants help as they look after the pupae of the butterfly. They form mounds with about 20,000 ants in each colony. Wild thyme likes to grow on or

near these mounds that can have as many as forty different plants growing nearby.

Thyme, used in mouthwash and yarrow are natural antiseptics. The leaf of the hairy plantain relieves the pain of a sting. Salad burnet eases blood problems and reduces fever and the great napweed is used as a cough medicine. Hawthorn grows easily with its flower, May blossom. It smells of dead flesh and is named after the month it blooms. Its leaves are good for the heart. Blackthorn is a coagulant, primrose a painkiller and coltsfoot helpful for treating asthma, bronchitis and catarrh. During WWI soldiers used to smoke blackthorn leaves as a substitute for tobacco.

Wild cabbage with yellow flowers and sea kale with white flowers are both abundant in the area. The Early Spider Orchid is abundant at Samphire Hoe with at least 12,000 there now. Many plants that grow at the Hoe flower during early March, so a visit around that time is well worth the effort.

In 1960/61 there were not many bushes to be seen on the chalk grassland. Hopefully with the way the area is now managed it will return to something like that again.

It is home to many types of wild animals such as voles, shrews, moles, rabbits, badgers and the pygmy shrew. Among the wild birds in the area are sparrow hawks, ravens, peregrine falcons, goldfinches, lapwings and kestrels.

On the 9th of February 2010, the herd of Konik Horses was moved from High Meadow onto Whinless Down which is also the only place in Kent you can find the scarce iridescent green Forester Moth. Two foals have been born since the move, one on the 5th the other on the 12th of March. There are currently seven adults and two foals in the herd but more mares will hopefully foal by the early summer.

Wild horses once roamed throughout Europe and England and are returning to the South East after 7,000 years. The Konik horse is a direct descendant of the now extinct European horse, the Tarpan. The breed nearly died out 100 years ago. In the nineteenth century, Polish farmers captured the last Tarpan horses and crossed them with their own workhorses. The result was a strong, hard working and manageable horse, which they named the Konik. Now a century later, Kent's wildlife experts have

brought a dozen of the Koniks back from Holland, one of the main breeding centres for the wild horses.

The Konik is a particularly interesting breed of horse not much bigger than a pony. It has a hardy, robust and self-reliant character, with a quiet temperament, and has a large head, broad body and strong legs. The herd has its own hierarchy with every horse having its own place in the pecking order.

In ancient times wild horses did not interact very much with humans. Today, the modern Konik horses are settling into their new homes in Kent at Stodmarsh, Ham Fen and Whinless Down.

They are already proving to be a great boost for the ecology of the areas. Koniks help to keep the land open and give plants, birds and insects the chance to settle there. They love to eat weeds, reeds and grass, so helping to stimulate wildlife diversity in their fenland and grassland habitats.

***Photographs by Paul Sampson***



*Konik foal on Whinless Down Local Nature Reserve*