

Diary of a Beck Steward (Part 2)



Maire O'Donnell is one of our Environment Group beck stewards. She patrols a stretch of the beck running from the top of Heathness Ghyll down to the bridge across to Acre Fold looking out for litter and invasive plants, such as Himalayan balsam, and recording the presence of wildflowers and wildlife.

Here she writes about her last outing with Sylvia and Peter:

"On the first of May we started at the top of the beck as it comes out from under the bypass.

As we arrived, we startled a Mandarin duck which took off into the woods as we approached.

I have not noticed one that far from the river previously.

There were small pieces of black plastic in parts of the beck, two plastic food bags, one in the water, another on the side of the beck. A white plastic bucket was in the middle of a leaky dam, degraded to the extent it had to come out in pieces.



A car tyre was found in mid-stream. We left it *in situ* as it was too heavy to pull out. We wondered if it had been rolled down from the Skipton Road wall for fun. We informed the landowner. Later in the day I walked up the left side of Skipton Road to check if there were more tyres, or fly tipping, but none was seen.

Sadly, but also happily as it was early in the season, we pulled out three small Himalayan balsam plants which were growing in gravel in the bed of the beck.

We managed to walk down through most of this upper part of the beck along Heathness Ghyll until near the Skipton Road bridge where the foliage prevented access, and so we had to view what we could from the field above. It appeared to be clear apart from two bits of litter, a bottle and a flask which must have been thrown over from the road.

As usual, we experienced the wonderment making our way through these beautiful woods and along the beck enjoying the warmth of the day with friends. Trees were coming into leaf, wildflowers covered grassy areas and along the beck sides: wood anemone, forget-me-not, bluebells, lesser celandine, wood sorrel, and speedwell.

Thanks as always to Mrs Haggas for permitting access to the beck and to Sylvia and Pete for their interest, help and support.

We continued our inspection on Friday 22nd May, starting on the golf course just below the bridge under Skipton Road, which we accessed through the thick undergrowth from the path around the 18th Tee.



We were thus able to observe the beck looking upstream back towards the bridge, as well as downstream.

The area appeared clear of litter and balsam as far as we could ascertain. However, for most of this stretch we were unable to get a close view of the bed of the beck or see under overhanging vegetation so there may well be golf balls in the water or balsam and litter in the deeper recesses.

Downstream trees and bushes obscure much of the beck but from the path close to the 17th tee we spotted one small balsam in the water and collected two small pieces of plastic waste.

We were also unable to access or see the part of the beck which flows between the houses on School Lane and the bottom part of the golf course near the 16th Hole.

However, the last part of our stretch can be viewed from the field across the beck from School Lane. Apart from one householder still tipping grass cuttings over the wall onto the side of the beck and very near the low water level, the beck appeared clean and litter free.

Thanks again to Sylvia and Peter for their assistance and hard work, especially among the thick and somewhat prickly “under” and “over” growth which we are becoming experts in trekking through.

