

Beck steward Maire O'Donnell

Our village Environment Group started up in 2016. One of our first projects was called the 4Becks project. Following the record-breaking flood of Boxing Day 2015 it was about flooding and flood risk but it was also about taking care of our becks. We were especially concerned about the general misuse of the becks as drains, the amount of rubbish in them, the spread of invasive species threatening native wildlife and the frequent occurrence of pollution.

We decided to invite our Environment Group volunteers to become beck stewards. We currently have 14 stewards keeping an eye on Back Beck and Town Beck from the top of the village down to Low Mill.

Here, Maire O'Donnell, one of our founding Environment Group members, writes about her beckstewarding.

"After many decades in interesting, at times exciting, varied and demanding professional work, who would have thought that after retirement I'd end up, as an Environment Group volunteer,



meandering around the Becks of the village, dressed in old clothes, waterproofs, wellies, protective gloves, a walking pole or litter picker and an old hat (not me certainly).

One landowner first met me, as I arose from a beck somewhat muddy, carrying two bags of litter, and with dried blood down one side of my face due to being scratched by brambles. She did not call the police so I assume I did not make too bad an impression! We remain on good terms.

I first got to know our becks through helping to remove the invasive plant species Himalayan balsam and then as a steward I took responsibility for 'my very own' section of Back Beck, albeit with a companion to keep me in check! Oops, I mean we work together, sharing queries, ignorance and knowledge and also keeping each

other safe.

We collect litter, notice and identify plants and animals, observe water flow, how clean it is or otherwise, we note the drainage pipes entering the beck and what, if anything is coming out of them. We additionally join forces with other volunteers on water quality testing days.

It is not always an idyllic walk-through though: Litter, glass bottles, cans and food cartons are thrown over from roads or footpaths onto land adjoining the beck, small burnt areas with tablet packs and silver foil have been noted and, now more common than previously, garden refuse, builders waste, and various forms of plastic and animal food bags are found, not to mention dog poo bags. We collect all



these where possible. All of these can end up in the water causing blockages, pollution, endangering wild birds and other animals and contributing to the poor condition of our streams, rivers and seas downstream.



On the other hand the benefits of our work are myriad: being out and about in fresh air with another volunteer and learning about each other as we work, hearing, and often seeing birds among the trees and bushes, enjoying exercise, walking regularly (a little clambering around helps flexibility), learning about bird song, identifying wild flowers, shrubs and trees, and keeping our senses keen by observing everything within sight and earshot and being able to identify what we hear and see, sometimes needing the help of Apps!

We work together with other members of the Environment Group, sharing experiences, information and companionship. It is a wonderful experience and a privilege to walk along the beck, observing and helping to protect this wonderful planet”

If you would like to join our beck steward team please email aeg@addingham.info