

Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust



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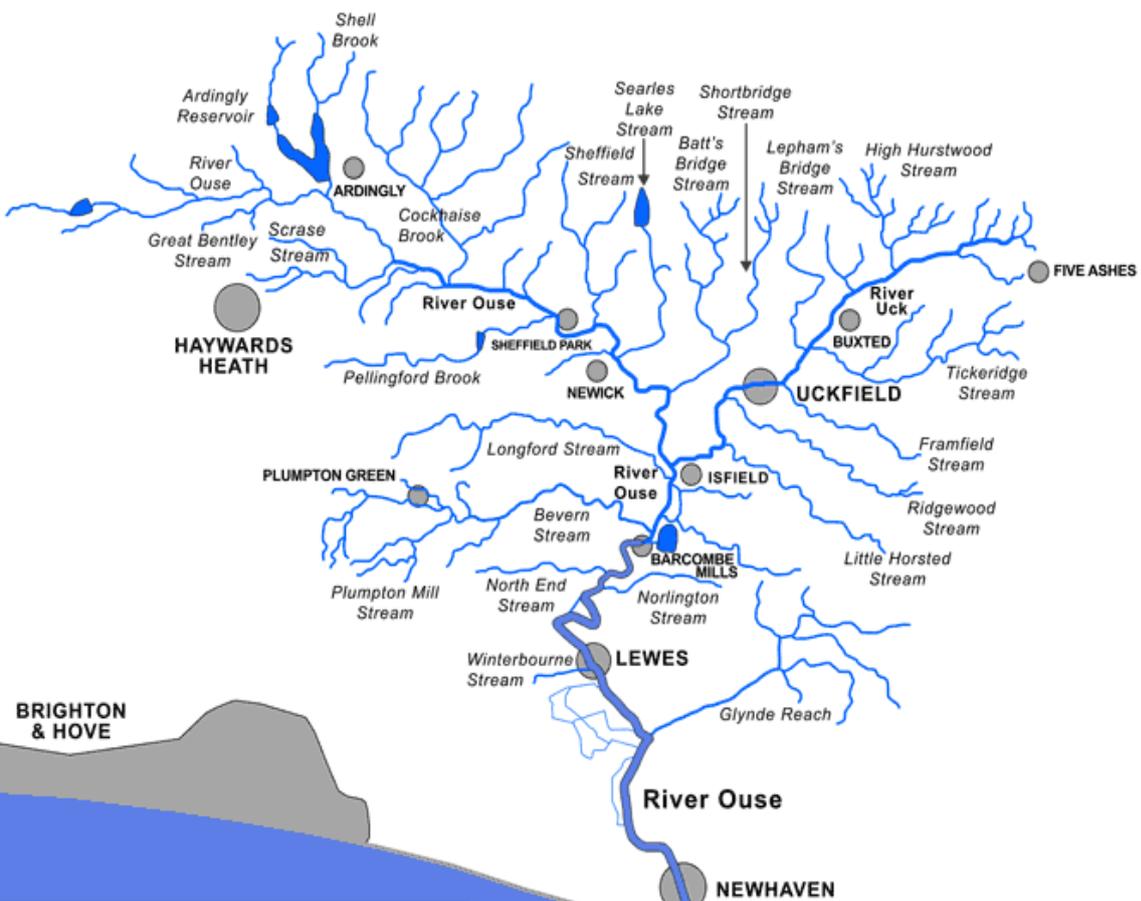
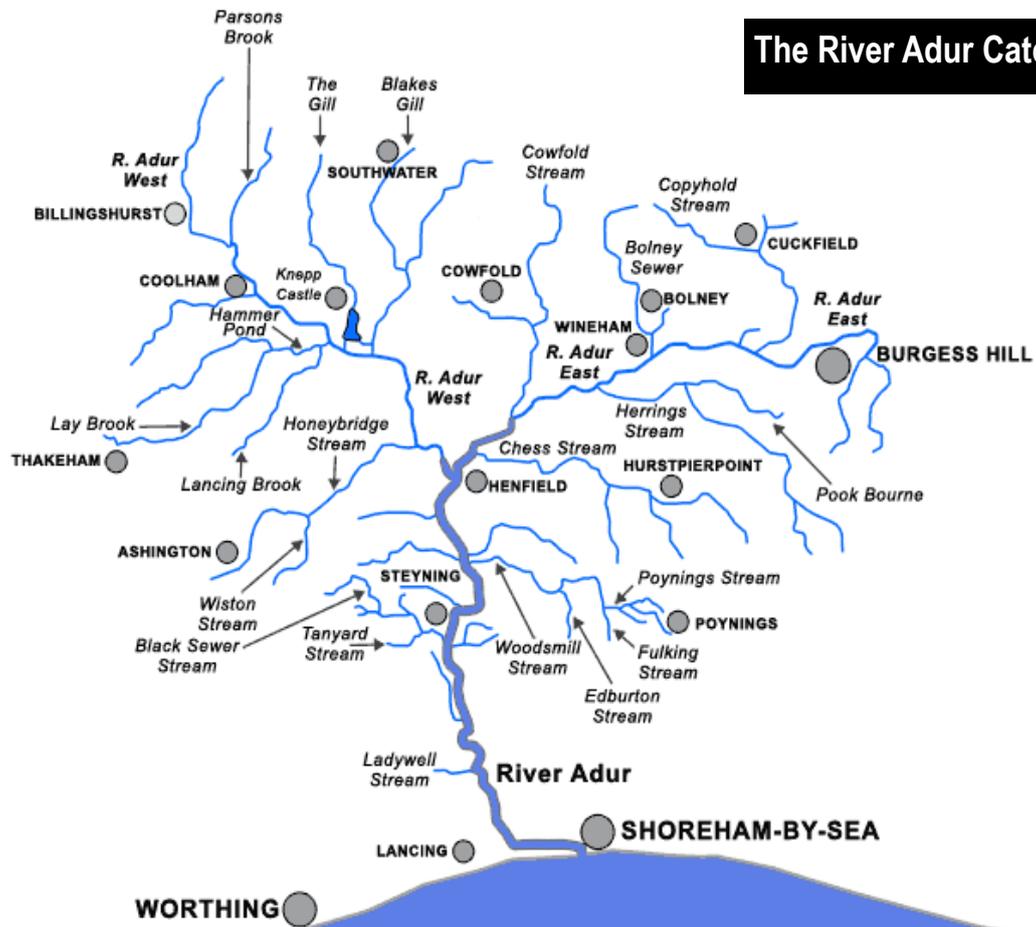
Winter 2015

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A Member of the Rivers Trust



The River Adur Catchment



The Sussex River Ouse Catchment

THE CHAIRMAN'S REPORT — HEW PRENDERGAST



We use maps, on the whole, for getting from A to B. Hardly surprising then that they are dominated by roads – different colours according to their size - and by settlements in black or grey. The blues of rivers and streams are relatively inconspicuous and more often than not there are no names. For example, on OS Explorer Map 122, covering Brighton & Hove, Lewes & Burgess Hill at a scale of 1: 25,000 (i.e. 2.5" to the mile), the Adur appears three times. Its tributaries the Cowfold Stream, Pook Bourne and Cutlers Brook once apiece. The Ouse also appears three times and the Uck, Glynde Reach, the Bevern and Longford Streams once each. Oddly, there are two mentions of the Celery Sewer on the Lewes Brooks and one of Spring Ditch between Firle and Glynde. Compare the paucity of such labelling with what appears on OART's river maps.

Driving round the countryside emphasises even more the invisibility of our watercourses. Over the last few months OART trustees have been keeping an eye open for those

that are indicated by the roads that pass over them. The 'best' sign so far, topped by the Martlets of East Sussex, is at Sheffield Park for the Ouse. The Ouse is also signed, in rather moss-encrusted fashion, at Fletching Mill and the Uck on the A22 Uckfield by-pass and at Isfield. So far, nothing at all has been seen in the Adur catchment! Such modesty for our watercourses surely does them no good. Apart from those who specifically use and enjoy them (anglers, kayakers, walkers) or who own their banks. For most people they may slip through our countryside unseen, unnamed, uncared – as do the problems associated with them.

OART has lots to do to change this. Our next steps include the Lewes Water Fair on 7 March, which follows from the one run by OART at Steyning last March. Also, the revamping of our website by improving its value for those interested in helping out with practical tasks through the spring and summer.

I hope you can join us !



The Woodcock

The woodcock is a wading bird with a very long straight tapering bill, short legs and is adapted for life in damp places in woodlands and fields. It spends the day in dense cover being largely nocturnal. The majority of the birds in the UK are residents. Other birds move here in the autumn flying great distances from far off countries such as Finland and even as far away as Russia to winter here. They return to their native countries to breed. There are about 78,000 UK males and 1.5 million wintering birds. In the south of England the best numbers occur in Kent, Sussex and Surrey but the highest numbers can be found in the north of England and in lowland Scotland.

The breeding population has been falling in recent years, perhaps because of the maturing and felling of coniferous woodland in Scotland.

In spring and early summer they perform their breeding display known as roding.

The preferred breeding and nesting habitat is amongst brambles or bracken in deciduous woodland. You may disturb one from its resting place on the edge or in woodland and see the Woodcock's distinctive zigzag flight as it darts through the trees while it looks for cover again.

Their diet consists of worms, beetles, larvae, caterpillars and small snails.



Project Officer Report

Happy New Year to all our members.

As we slide gently into 2015 it gives a chance to reflect on what was achieved during 2014 and look ahead to what is planned for the 12 months ahead.

Over the past year we have been busy working across both rivers within our catchment with activity summarised below. Along with the successful delivery of projects we have developed a number of collaborations which proved successful in project delivery over the past 12 months as well as providing further opportunities in the coming year.

Adur	Ouse
First Sussex Water Fair in Steyning	Completed backwater creation on the Bevern ²
University of Brighton Floodplain Feasibility Study	Implementing elver monitoring at Clappers Weir ²
1km of in-channel enhancements; Knepp Estate ¹	Over 40km of tributaries surveyed
Removal of one weir structure at Shipley ²	Restoration completed at Buxted & Spring Meadow ²
Removal of three weir structures at Twineham ²	Landowner Workshop on the Uck ¹
Started the Adur mink control strategy ¹	Eel pass re-fitted at Redbridge Weir
Water Quality Testing on Parsons Brook	Water Quality Testing on Longford Stream
Project Development at Numerous Sites	Assisting SE Water on the Upstream Thinking project
	Removal of sluice gate at Hempstead Mill ²
	Project Development at Numerous Sites

¹ Projects undertaken in collaboration with Sussex Wildlife Trust, the South Downs National Park Authority, South East Water and/or Campaign for Farmed Environment.

² Projects undertaken in collaboration with the Environment Agency.

These include fish passage improvements at Shermanbury, Wineham and Partridge Green on the Adur, as well as in-channel enhancements on the main river and Herrings Stream. We are also hoping to develop and increase the mink control programme on the Adur and undertake some floodplain woodland creation.

Over the past year we have greatly increased our activity on the River Adur with Steyning being chosen as the venue for the first Sussex Water Fair which was attended by over 400 people. We also removed four weir structures which were causing blockage to multi-species fish passage (one at Shipley and three at Twineham). I have also worked with students from the University of Brighton in modelling the potential for floodplain creation on the River Adur including the feasibility of realigning embankments.

We teamed up with the Wild Trout Trust and Sussex Wildlife Trust in undertaking a 1km in-channel enhancement project on the main river as it flows through the Knepp Estate, just south of Horsham. We have also been involved and are currently leading on the first catchment scale mink control project on the Adur with our first mink rafts going out around the Twineham area. Finally on the Adur we have, at the request of the Environment Agency, began a focused programme of water quality testing on Parsons Brook.

Activity on the River Ouse saw the backwater creation project completed on the Bevern providing fish refuge habitat along with some floodplain enhancements. In addition we also started our first season of elver monitoring on the Bevern at Clappers Weir. One of my objectives for the year was to get out surveying the tributaries to increase OARTs knowledge of the catchment and provide a focus for the coming years work programme; just over 40km of river has been surveyed with results being compiled into reports for publication at the end of March. Also this year we finished the restoration work at Buxted Park and Spring Meadow as part of the MORPH project.

In spring 2014 we collaborated with South East Water, the TrUck project and the Campaign for the Farmed Environment in hosting a landowner workshop on the River Uck focused on water quality, soil management and natural flood management techniques. This event was attended by over 40 landowners. Finally we have been working with South East Water in progressing their project Ouse Upstream Thinking and undertaking a series of farm walkovers to assess where improvements can be made to mitigate the effects of runoff.

On the Ouse we are currently planning a Water Fair for Lewes on 7th March along with a similar event in Uckfield later in the year.

Our main focus will be on completing the tributary surveys along with further eel passage enhancements, the fitting of a fish pass at East Mascalls road bridge and projects focused on the overall ecology and geomorphology of the Bevern and Longford Streams. So a busy year ahead and I will keep the website and newsletter updated with progress as these projects develop.

Pete

Peter.king@oart.org.uk / 07881 458134

Works on the River Adur – Twineham

In the summer newsletter report I stated that OART had just taken the lead on delivering a project to remove three weirs at Twineham, one on the main river and two on the Herrings Stream. Since then the project has been successfully undertaken as a collaboration between OART, the Environment Agency and the landowner.

Using a new approach within the catchment (and we believe to be the first ever in collaboration with the Environment Agency) we contracted the landowner to deliver the programme of works which produced a cost saving in excess of 50% of the original contractor quotes. Clearly this approach cannot be undertaken everywhere with the landowner owning all his own equipment and skilled personnel which, after some long discussions, were accepted as having the relevant experience to undertake the project.

With an extended period of dry weather over the summer the project was completed, without any complications, within 7 weeks. We now plan to continue to work with the landowner to create habitat both within the channel and on the surrounding flood plain.





Pepper's pot pourri.

Rummaging through some old files I came across the very first issue of the Sussex Ouse Conservation Society's Newsletter dated December 1998. It was a quite modest affair being made up of two sheets of A4 folded to make an eight-page booklet. It was mainly concerned with setting out the aims of the Society and, most notably, it was edited by none other than Valerie Miles. This means that Val has been editor for 16 years and produced 63 editions! We did the printing ourselves originally. I know this because I was, for a time, in charge of a brute of a printer, which malfunctioned on a regular basis until SOCS bought an improved printer and Val did the printing in her own home and there was a team of collators on hand to help. The more recent editions of the Newsletter, now professionally printed, are much more attractive and make our scribblings look really good. Val, we are proud of you. Please keep going for as long as you can.

On a different level of journalism, I have just read a book called 'Rivers' by Nigel Holmes and Paul Raven. Very sadly, Nigel Holmes has died since the book was published but it is fitting tribute to him.

It has chapters covering all aspects of the history of rivers, how they function, their wildlife and how we have abused them in the recent past and what we should be doing to restore them. The book is well illustrated and is a mine of information. I was particularly interested in some of the historical facts and how productive rivers once were. The River Thames was once the finest freshwater fishing in the south. In 1816 3000 salmon were caught and in the early 1800s a million River Lampreys was the normal annual catch.

Eels, which are now a species causing some concern, were once used to pay the landlords rent. Domesday Book records annual rents in Cambridgeshire payable with eels. At Wisbech it was 33,266 a year and 27,150 at Doddington. The young glass eels are still caught in this country, not surprisingly as, in 2011, they fetched £690 a kilo for export to the Far East. Small fish were also exploited. Eleven gallons of minnows were served at a banquet for Richard II; gudgeon were caught in the Thames and cooked on the riverbank for fishing parties and three-spined sticklebacks caught in Fenland rivers were spread on the land as manure. Burbot, a fresh water cod last seen in the Great Ouse in 1972 were once so common they were fed to pigs.

I could go on but rather I would recommend buying the book. It does though have one big drawback for local people. There is no mention of the Rivers Ouse or Adur. Even a map of the countries major rivers has a big gap between the Arun and the Cuckmere. What have we done to upset the authors? 'Rivers' is published by British Wildlife Publishing for £35



The River Adur and the Knepp Estate

The histories of the Adur and Ouse help us understand why the rivers look how they do. Thanks largely to the needs of transport and agriculture they have been heavily modified over time.

Richard Symonds, of the Horsham District Archaeology Group, has written (March 2012) an account of The River Adur and the Knepp Estate which can be read on the Knepp Castle website (www.knepp.co.uk). Amongst other facts and topics,

he mentions how the river got its name; that it was tidal up to Knepp in the 16C (i.e. about three miles further upstream than now). Also the mooring stone in Shipley Church and the wharf at West Grinstead; and the straightening and canalisation in the early 19th century between Capps and Tenchford bridges. Also on the website is an article by Richard on The former Mills of the Knepp Estate.

Now of course much of OART's work is devoted to undoing those constructs of the past that are both redundant and undermining the health of the rivers and their wildlife.

Lewes Water Fair

Following on from the huge success of the Steyning Water Fair held in 2014, OART are working in collaboration with the Sussex Flow Initiative project (Sussex Wildlife Trust) to host the second Sussex Water Fair, this time on the River Ouse at Lewes. The event is to be held on Saturday 7th March at the Linklater Pavilion, Railway Lane, Lewes between 10am and 4pm. The event brings together a wide range of organisations focused on improving the water environment within the Ouse catchment with a specific focus on flood resilience, water quality and water consumption. These organisations include the Environment Agency, Water Companies, the Biosphere Reserve, Rivers Trust, Wildlife Trust and the University of Brighton to name a few. There will also be the opportunity to see new ideas based on Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDS). These events are a great opportunity for the community to come and learn about the work going on across the catchment but also for the organisations to learn about community concerns. The event will be preceded by the delivery of questionnaires to 2500 homes in Lewes (which will also be available on line) which will provide important information on current community awareness and provide a focus for future works. For further information please email me at peter.king@oart.org.uk.



THE WATER FAIR
AWARENESS | EDUCATION | RESOLUTION

A Short History of Barcombe Mills

There have been mills at Barcombe since Saxon times but none of them remains today. There were also settlements in the area. The ones from the Roman era at Bridge Farm and Culver Farm are currently undergoing archaeological investigation. Bronze Age axes and other artefacts have been found in the locality and it is evident that the Romans constructed a number of roads from various directions to what must have been an important site at Barcombe Mills.

There was a ford at Barcombe in the First or Second Century and a Roman road crossed the river at this point. The evidence for this ford was uncovered when the river was dredged after the 1960 Lewes floods. The first bridge over the Ouse was constructed here in 1066 and later a mill stood astride it.

The last working Mill was erected at Barcombe Mills in 1870. It was served by a railway siding from the nearby Barcombe Mills station. This mill was converted to a button factory in the early 1930s. The factory used bone nuggets and also ivory imported from Italy for manufacture of the buttons. The factory still used the four turbines of the original mill sited where there is now a mound housing the atmospheric siphon. The siphon was constructed in the late 1960s and operates automatically in high spate events. The button factory burnt down in March 1939, (much of it was constructed of pitch pine), and was not rebuilt.

When the river was canalised in the 1790s, the bridge and mill were left intact to preserve the miller's rights. The miller also had the right to charge tolls for crossing the bridge. Another bridge, known as Pikes Bridge, had to be built over the canal, and a third one constructed over part of the Iron River, now known as Andrews Stream. There was also a "head and tail" stream controlled by penstock boards to the North of the mill. This allowed water to bypass the mill when it was not in operation. It also fed a lake in the grounds of what is now known as Barcombe House and the stream is known as the House Stream. A fourth bridge carried the road over this stream. The House Stream now has an automatic sluice with a flow gauge at its upper end and also a stone/concrete weir with a central Larinier fish pass halfway down and another weir at the lower end below the old mill site.



Andrews Weir – This picture was taken about 50 years ago. You can just see the boardwalk over the crest of the weir. There was no fish pass provision but the sea trout managed to get over it some of the time.

Andrews Weir was constructed in the late 18th century and retained water in the Andrews Cut above it. Barges were moored here when there was insufficient water in the river for them to move upstream. This illustrates the fact that even back then a lack of water in the river could present problems. Subsequently the weir was rebuilt with a central Larinier fish pass and much later the Environment Agency removed an old weir in the course of Andrews Stream and installed three step weirs just downstream of the main weir to ease fish passage. Interestingly, the crest of Andrews Weir is set slightly lower than the other weirs. The reason for this is unknown.

At the advent of the Second World War a new road was constructed to the south of the existing road and a Bailey Bridge with a wooden deck spanned the river. Trainloads of rubble from the blitzed buildings in London were used for building the road. The bridge had its good and bad points.

It obviously made a more suitable crossing for motor traffic and provided it was kept clear of debris water could get away easily in spate conditions. However, it was very prone to getting clogged up with rubbish washed down the river, which had to be regularly cleared. There was one instance when some wag thought he would clear the stuff by setting fire to it; not a good idea for any bridge let alone one with a wooden deck. The local fire brigade had to be called out to deal with the situation.

The Bailey Bridge at Barcombe Mills circa 1960.

(Note the debris festooning the structure.)



This bridge was replaced in the early 1970s with the permanent structure that we see today and the road was completely realigned. The bridge was poorly designed unfortunately as there is insufficient provision for passage of water in high spate conditions. This has resulted in some properties at Barcombe Mills being more susceptible to flooding.

Most of the edifices that we now see at Barcombe Mills were built in the late 1950s to early 1960s. The large central weir, known as New Weir, was constructed on an island in the river and is used as a gauging weir to measure the flow. It, together with the other smaller weirs in the complex holds back a head of water to supply the waterworks a short distance upstream. This was built at the same time together with a service reservoir. The reservoir covers an area of over 50 acres in the floodplain of the river. The consequent removal of an area of connectivity for the river increased the risk of flooding properties in the Barcombe Mills hamlet and the town of Lewes.

The short canal between the main river and Andrews Stream featured two locks for barge traffic. Only the brick walls of the upper lock still remain and this part of the watercourse now has several low step weirs along its length, easily passable for migrating fish.

The Sussex River Ouse has suffered periodic bouts of intrusive engineering over its history. The first and probably most damaging one was its modification in the late 18th century from Lewes almost to Balcombe, incorporating 19 locks, to allow use by barge traffic. It is interesting to note that the Navigation Act at the time prohibited use by any boats weighing less than 9 tons. There is no evidence that this Act was ever repealed, so technically all the current pleasure boat, kayak and canoe users may be breaking the law !

The ultimate demise of Ouse navigation came when barges were used to take a huge number of bricks up the river for the building of the Balcombe railway viaduct. The railways could of course transport goods and materials in far greater quantities and much more speedily than barges, so the barge companies had effectively shot themselves in the foot. Very soon after this event navigation on the Ouse ceased.

The second assault on the Ouse at Barcombe Mills came with the massive construction project involving the weirs, waterworks and the reservoir in the mid 20th century. The project included a lot of dredging of the river between the weirs and the waterworks complex and diversion of the Iron River. Hundreds of trees were felled and habitats destroyed.

A third ecological disaster took place after Lewes flooded in 1960. The authorities, in a knee jerk reaction, dredged the river from Barcombe Mills down to Lewes and beyond and raised the banks to prevent flooding of adjacent farmland. This transformed that section of the river from a natural riffle/pool sequence with a rich biodiversity to a sluggish muddy bottomed and featureless drain. It has never recovered from this onslaught and probably never will.

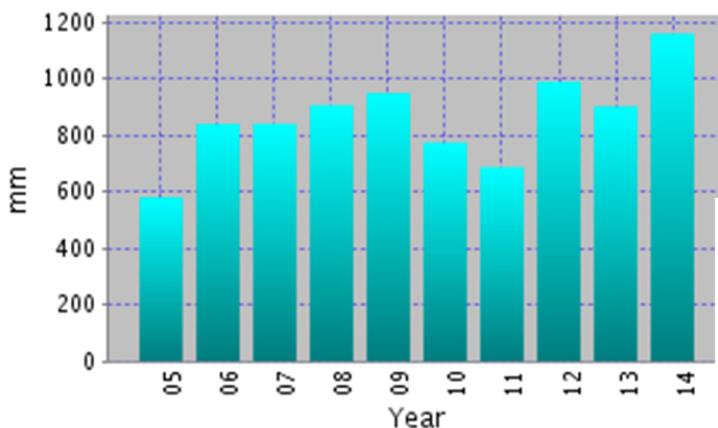
The effectiveness of these operations is questionable as Lewes was flooded again in 1968 and subsequently (and more severely) in 2000.

On a more optimistic note, much is being done by the Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust, in partnership with the Environment Agency, to restore both the river and its tributaries to a healthy environmental state. There is still much to be done but attitudes are changing and the outdated philosophy of "dredge it and drain it" has been rightly kicked in to touch.

For information on how we are achieving our ambitions, please visit our web site www.oart.org.uk

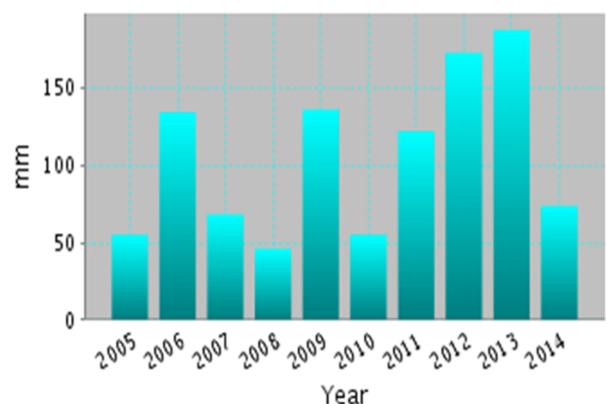
Jim Smith – Field Officer OART and J.E."Sam" St.Pierre – Vice Chairman OART

Annual Rainfall



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December Rainfall



The rainfall for December was 73.8 mm compared to the mean for the month of 89.8 mm. The total for the year however, at 1160 mm, was the highest recorded at Barcombe since recording was started in 1995.

WATER TESTING

OART is currently concentrating its water testing programme on individual streams within the catchment. At present we are covering the Longford Stream (River Ouse) and Parson's Brook (River Adur).

The Environment Agency, with whom we collaborate closely, has requested that we investigate Parson's Brook, to find out if there are any ongoing problems with water quality. So far, the results have been reasonable except for rather high concentrations of nitrate in some of the locations.

We are continuing to sample the Longford Stream at monthly intervals until April this year, when we will have results for a twelve month period. The findings to date have shown high levels of ammonia at times in the upper reaches and generally high phosphate levels and very low oxygen saturation in some locations during the summer months. A full report on our findings will be published at the conclusion of the exercise.

Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust—Water Quality Chemical Analysis

Date 7.12.2014; Atmospheric Pressure at 14.27 hours, 1017 mbar, 762.8 torr falling

Site	NH ₃ (as N) mg/l	PO ₄ (as PO ₄) mg/l	Dissolved O ₂ mg/l	Dissolved O ₂ %satn	NO ₃ (as N) mg/l	Temp °C	Turbidity observed	pH	
Parsons Brook, upper tributary, R. Adur									
1	Parsons Bridge	0.05	0.48	>10.0	>82.05%	6.2	6.6	Low flow clear	7.3
2	Two Mile Ash Road	0.08	0.35	9.7	79.8%	6.2	7.1	Low flow cloudy	7.3
3	Trout Lane	0.04	0.88	9.2	76.1%	2.7	7.3	Very low flow clear	7.2
4	Chapel Road	0.13	0.32	9.5	76.4%	6.6	6.2	Low flow cloudy	7.0

NOTES:

Values for ammonia, phosphate, and dissolved oxygen have been colour-coded to reflect the WFD intervals for Chemical Status, rather than our previous limits based on the EU Habitats Directive. A key to Status intervals/boundaries is given below. For nitrates, which are not covered by WFD, we will continue with our present ranking system as below.

Dissolved O₂: 10 mg/litre is top of the range for our instrument

pH is a measure of the acidity of water. On this scale, rainwater is pH 6.8 while tap water is pH 7.5

Grid References for Sites

1 Parsons Bridge TQ 12843 26410	3 Trout Lane TQ 13238 26541
2 Two Mile Ash Road TQ 13117 26808	4 Chapel Road TQ 12541 26908

WFD Chemical Status Intervals

WFD Status	NH ₃ as N mg/l	PO ₄ as PO ₄ mg/l	O ₂ % satn
HIGH	<0.3	<0.15	>70
GOOD	0.3–0.6	0.15–0.36	60–70
MODERATE	0.6–1.1	0.36–0.75	54–60
POOR	1.1–2.5	0.75–3.0	45–54
BAD	>2.5	>3.0	<45

OART Ranking for Nitrates

Nitrate ranking	NO ₃ as N mg/l
Good	<2.0
Moderate	2.0 – 5.0
Poor	>5.0

Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust—Water Quality Chemical Analysis

Date 4.1.2015; Atmospheric Pressure at 10.00 hours, 1037 mbar, 777.8 torr rising

Site	NH ₃ (as N) mg/l	PO ₄ (as PO ₄) mg/l	Dis-solved O ₂ mg/l	Dis-solved O ₂ % satn	NO ₃ (as N) mg/l	Temp °C	Turbidity FTUs	Conductivity μS/cm	pH	
Longford Stream										
1	South Road	0.45	1.14	>10	>78.1	1.2	5.8	52	560	7.05
2	Beresford Lane	0.32	1.18	>10	>78.3	0.0	5.9	48.25	370	6.87
3	A275 Chailey	0.32	2.5	>10	>80.3	1.3	6.9	49.28	320	7.18
4	Cinder Hill	0.29	0.48	>10	>79.9	2.1	6.7	47.08	295	6.94
5	Cockfield Bridge	0.29	0.2	>10	>77.1	1.5	5.3	51	420	6.67
6	Ridgelands Lane	0.85	0.19	>10	>78.9	0.0	6.2	51	340	6.91
7	Longford Bridge	0.32	2.4	>10	>78.1	0.0	5.8	58	410	6.89
8	Dallas Lane	0.62	1.99	>10	>78.3	0.0	5.9	53	414	7.14

NOTES:

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Dissolved O₂: 10 mg/litre is top of the range for our instrument

Turbidity is measured in Formazine Turbidity Units (FTUs)

Conductivity is a measure of the mineral salts dissolved in water and is measured in units of microsiemens per centimetre (μS/cm). On this scale, local tap water has conductivity 416 and rainwater 56 μS/cm. **Abnormally high values are flagged up in red**

pH is a measure of the acidity of water. On this scale, rainwater is pH 6.8 while tap water is pH 7.5

Grid References for Sites

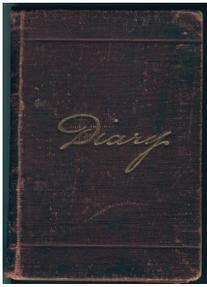
1 South Road TQ 360 191	3 A275 Chailey TQ 391 195	5 Cockfield Lane Bridge TQ 408 193	7 Longford Bridge TQ 431 181
2 Beresford lane TQ 372 196	4 Cinder Hill TQ 400 196	6 Ridgelands lane TQ 415 193	8 Dallas Lane TQ 438 178

WFD Chemical Status Intervals

WFD Status	NH ₃ as N mg/l	PO ₄ as PO ₄ mg/l	O ₂ % satn
HIGH	<0.3	<0.15	>70
GOOD	0.3–0.6	0.15–0.36	60–70
MODERATE	0.6–1.1	0.36–0.75	54–60
POOR	1.1–2.5	0.75–3.0	45–54
BAD	>2.5	>3.0	<45

OART Ranking for Nitrates

Nitrate ranking	NO ₃ as N mg/l
Good	<2.0
Moderate	2.0 – 5.0
Poor	>5.0



Jim's Diary



5th November started with a cold and frosty morning just right for the annual Lewes Bonfire Night celebrations. It was fine and cold and I had a very enjoyable evening in Lewes. Earlier I had watched for Sea Trout running up through the Mills and saw several and more on the Uck at Isfield Sluice. There was a lot of heavy rain the next day but no fish showing at the Mills although I saw six of various sizes at the sluice in Isfield where there is a large fish pass to the upper river. On the 11th I walked to the Mills in a small flood where I saw five Sea Trout at the big weir and the Anchor gates were chained wide open for the winter. Fish had been seen at Red Bridge as part of the annual spawning run. I saw a Red Kite that morning and two Herons on a pool in a field. I checked the pool but there were no fish stranded there and the Herons squawked at me in protest at being disturbed. I saw nothing two days later at the usual spawning sites; the river was quite coloured and heavy rain was forecasted. The rain came in over night and throughout the morning. We had a successful Bonfire Night in Isfield with a huge bonfire and a firework display. A credit to all I felt. Sunday, 16th. was very mild. I could see Blackcap in a mist. I went to look at the Bevern and other tributaries which all looked high and coloured. When I got to Sharp's Bridge there was mayhem with all the small birds on a field being terrorised by a hungry Peregrine. These birds fly very fast and chatter the sound of kek-kek. I watched from the road for several minutes but did not see it make a strike. The following Sunday, 23rd. November there was heavy rain all day. I checked the culverts and cleared debris and watched the streams and Ouse rising fast. I saw no migratory fish anywhere. The following day started with a heavy frost. At Isfield Mill sluice six Sea Trout were seen as well as at Sutton Hall. Thursday, 27th was dull and overcast. Wood Pigeons were feeding on ivy berries and the first Fieldfares to arrive were on the Brooks feeding on berries. That evening I went to a Parish Council meeting. I was treated to an early Christmas lunch the following day with friends from the Lavender Line at Isfield. We had a very nice evening. There was good news on Saturday, 29th because five Sea Trout were seen in a place on a local tributary where they had not been seen for several years.

DECEMBER 2014

I went to the Mills but no fish were seen on the tributary. I checked the gravels which were fairly clear and there was a good flow but no fish. Blackcap was visible from my window on Wednesday 3rd. It was cold outside when I went out to feed the birds. I had yet another Christmas lunch to look forward to and this time with the Isfield Forget-Me-Not Club where both good company and food were provided. A former parish councillor and I had a parish clean up on the 4th. We went along the roadside verges picking up all sorts even plastic bags of dog mess and collected another eight black bags of rubbish thrown down by people disrespectful of the countryside. On 6th. I checked a feeder stream and saw eight fish on number of redds which was good to see after all our hard work on the gravels. Back at the Mills there was a lot of water and the public car park at Barcombe Mills where a lot of dumped rubbish is left behind; there was little choice but to take it upon myself to collect the rubbish and take it all back to Isfield for collection - dog mess and all ! There was a hard frost on 9th with good visibility but rain was forecasted for later and it arrived early evening. Another very hard frost started Sunday 14th. I walked to the feeder streams and found more big redds with fish spawning and dropping back quickly. There were a lot of birds about too. On Friday, 19th I walked along the Ouse from Isfield to Barcombe Mills. I disturbed a Green Woodpecker from a riverside tree and I could hear a Wren calling from up in the ivy. There were Siskins in the Alders. Away from the river in local wood I heard the chattering rattle of the Mistle Thrush. On that short morning walk I also watched a fox working his way up a hedgerow hoping for rabbits no doubt. On the 21st there was too much water to check the redds. All the sluice gates were open at the Mills and the water was very coloured. I saw only two Green Woodpeckers and two Buzzards. I went out again next day but saw nothing at any of the fish passes at the Mills. Thursday, 25th. Christmas Day had arrived and I went out to check a local stream where I saw seven Sea Trout before returning for a Christmas lunch with good friends. I joined in the New Year's Eve celebrations on 31st. and on the stroke of midnight 2015 came in with a bang. Let's hope for a happy new year for us all.



JANUARY 2015

The Saxons are said to have called January the wolf month because wolves devoured most of their human victims at that time. Even now the January moon is called the wolf moon. The Tawny Owls have been quite active during the wolf moon period. The Druids used to worship the oak tree. A friend of mine who is a retired farmer told me that long ago he used to feed his sheep on swedes but sadly nowadays swedes are no longer grown as much as turnips. The 4th saw the Ouse in flood. A low flying helicopter put up some Barnacle Geese from the fields near the reservoir. Three rods were fishing in difficult conditions. Time, I thought, for a walk on drier ground up on the Downs above Firle. It was very wet up there too but I took a short walk to Firle Beacon and back looking down on a very wet Weald and the Glynde Levels. There was more heavy rain overnight on the 8th and flood warnings for the Uck and Ouse which both flooded over their banks. More heavy rain fell on 14th. and 16th. when I went to look at plans for a proposed large development in Uckfield. It was flooded now but I wondered where the developers thought all the water would come from, in a normally water starved area, to provide adequate for all these new houses and would the sewage works cope and other services like schools and GP practices with at least 1000 new houses proposed. On Sunday 18th. there was a lot of water coming down. I went to Rodmell Brooks where I saw Egrets, a Buzzard but no Short-Eared Owls. Two Kingfishers were on the Celery Sewer. A small flock of Widgeon flew in and I saw a Grey Seal on the Sound going seawards.

REDD WATCH 2014/2015

It has been an excellent spawning season for the Sea Trout. I have counted 40 redds on a long stretch of the middle Bevern and also numerous other places. This is good news for all the hard work done by the Task Force introducing new gravel which has been well used

with so far no mortalities. There has been plenty of water for them to mend up in and get back to the sea. Spawning started early this year with some large fish and very large redds. So a pat on the back to all who have taken part in this vital work in the Ouse valley. Thank you all. We hope now for no washouts of redds.

On a final note I a tale about what I like to call a lucky Sea Trout which I found in a water filled gully in a field by the Uck. I had taken a landing net with me just in case of this event of this happening. As I approached I saw gulls circling over the gully. When I got there I found a large Sea Trout flapping in shallow water. I estimated the weight to be an 8-9lbs hen fish. I was able to net her and returned her unharmed to the main Uck. I held her in the net for a while and she eventually swam off with no problems. A lucky ending for a fish that somehow had got stranded and lost her way back to the river as the water retreated.



I will close this diary and wish all our farmers and landowners best wishes for 2015 and thank you for all your help and co-operation.

Jim Smith

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