

Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook: Occasional Titbits, No. 20, August 2011

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Chairman: John Collins Secretary: Holly Anderson

Please forward or print out and pass on to anyone else who may be interested. If you have items suitable for inclusion please let me have them as they arise. If you wish to be taken off this group email list please let me know.

1. The Snakey Path interpretation boards. The top two photographs show the board which was recently installed at St. Bedes Crescent. The photograph, below left, shows the second board at the junction of Snakey Path and Burnside. We are grateful to Guy Belcher, the City Council Nature Conservation Projects Officer, for helping us to apply for the necessary £1,000 grant and for being intermediary in the design, production and installation of the boards. Our thanks also to member Monica Frisch who guided the design of the map so diligently.



Within 24 hours of their installation the fridge in the bottom right photograph was dumped within sight of the St. Bedes Crescent board. (The speeding cyclist is on Snakey Path.) An ironing board lay not far away. The banks of the entire length of the Brook provide a most convenient dumping ground for the use of local, and not-so-local residents.

2. An unusual plant at Forest Road: willow moss (*Fontinalis antipyretica*). Where the road crosses the Brook look upstream and you will see several dark green patches of what looks like an algae growing on the stream bed. Unusually, at this time of year parts of the plant are growing above the water level (only a few cms), but usually it is completely submerged. Mosses have no strong supporting tissues, so if they grow on land can only reach a height of a few cms. However, supported by the water, *Fontinalis* will grow into long strands of up to 50 cms. It is thus Britain's largest moss. There are a few patches further downstream from the bridge – presumably pieces break off from the main plant and take root if they reach a suitable part of the stream bed.

The name comes from the use of moss as an insulating material in the walls of houses in Lapland. Its other claim to fame is in the investigation of the external factors, such as temperature, which affect the rate of photosynthesis. It was the plant chosen by Blackman in his studies at the university department of Botany here in Cambridge. His results represented a considerable advance in our knowledge of photosynthesis and led to the idea of 'limiting factors'. Each year the most promising research student in the Department of Plant Sciences of Cambridge University is invited to give the Blackman Lecture. Not bad for a humble water moss! **(Contributed by Sid Maskall)**

David Brooks, 23 August 2011