

Project report

Gardens & Estate



Weather

The snow has gone, but icy cold continued followed by foggy, cloud-forest & windy days, unsettled – not heavy downpours but grey & wet with rare glimpses of sunshine at the month-end.

February	summary	2011
Temp °C	max / min	10 - 1
	average max / min	16.2
Wind mph	max average in day	10.7
Rain	dry days <1mm	4
	mm max on one day	56
	mm total for month	403
	inches	15.87

Activity

February 2011

In the gardens

- Jobs of late winter continued, tidying the dead and dying from the plants ready for new spring growth. Home-made **compost applied to hungry root-zones** as the soil began to warm and new compost was started with shreadings from the old plant material.
- Ruth Charles bossed the massed dirty plant pots awaiting spring-cleaning and new tenants in the coming months.
- At the entrance to the new Fern Garden root-plate of big windblown oak (a relic of the tornado January 2005) now well-planted with **Common Polypody fern** that thrives so happily in Lake District walls.
- Coming to the end of their life, many fence-posts in the Lower Garden temporarily supported awaiting a trial with **metpost sockets** which may assist repair/replacement of the extensive woodwork in this area.
- Foundations prepared for the re-location of existing cold-frames to clear the way for potting shed/store extension. Now need the builder to do the work – does this sound familiar? I have faith.
- Also began **relocation of thousands of snowdrops** and some wood anemones that may be buried by shed work. Looking forward to enjoying the results, particularly in the Fern Garden, this winter.
- Preparing Purgatory for the spring, Zig-zaggy has been tidied and refreshed. Provoked an interesting question at break-time – ‘Shall I sand your lips?’ – naturally referring to the woodwork repairs and **re-glossing of the luscious lips** in the terrace of ‘Lust’.

compost for hungry roots

Common Polypody fern

Metpost

snowdrop relocation

luscious lips



Around the estate

- Repairs to paths & hard surfaces continue after hard weather of previous months.
- Public toilets water shortage and pressure drop finally traced to tree-roots in the plastic water-pipe. How do they do it?
- Repairs to estate **dry-stone walls** tumbled by weather and tree-rock. A cold and difficult job with crumbling & odd-shaped stone.
- In front of Brantwood House the **hay meadows have achieved official County recognition** for quality of plant diversity. They are now potential ‘seed donor’ meadows that can help traditional hay meadow restoration in this area.
- A case of looking into it – we have been locating entrances to pipes and old drains prior to hiring a **CAT detector** for tracing routes and depth of many different water-pipes and channels that help with land drainage.
- Annual firewood harvest from thinning of birch trees on the moorland edge at Crag Head. A labour of love for ex-farmer and forester, Bill Atkinson.

With other partners

- Felled a small area of coppice wood in High Gill Croft, near Lawson Park. Dressed and sorted into poles, pea-sticks, besom-broom materials, walking stick and other materials by 2 Duke of Edinburgh student groups completing John Muir environmental Awards with Thurston Outward Bound Centre.
- 40 children from Parton School, near Whitehaven, visited to gain ideas for **developing their own school outdoor learning facilities**.

The result – ‘the house and the activities worked really well, with lots of excellent questions and observations made by the children. The grounds were also really interesting and the children enjoyed the tasting and are talking about growing vegetables, and a parent had volunteered to help the school with this, which is excellent news.

Many of the children were fascinated by the weaving and woodworking.

We have just completed our Brantwood exploration by making dramatised readings of ‘Learning to See’ and having a go at weaving using willow and we are hoping that we can create a school curiosity cabinet. The youngsters were fascinated with it. We also used the idea of a curiosity cabinet as a visual device for the children to stick post-it notes on while they were thinking of ideas of things that that we could do and use in our space.’

Brantwood Soil Life Project

- Practical work – Apple pruning now complete, mostly using the Moon phases to reduce risk of fungal disease. ‘Thank You’ South Lakes Orchard group members, Team Charles’ and Brantwood volunteers for making this a fairly painless operation this year. Even the tall, ancient apples in the Wild Garden are now becoming more accessible through ‘de-horning’ of high branches & watched pony ‘Sam’ & Exmoor friends ‘jousting’ in the wood from the top of the ladder (see ‘Pony Potential’ – report Jan 2011).
- Communication work - An excellent article about our work in the orchard can be found in SLOG Newsletter 7 at <http://www.slorchards.co.uk/Newsletters.htm>

Proposed Master’s Degree in Environmental and Social Education research

- My application made for the course beginning September 2011. Funding has been offered for course fees. I must now seek maintenance and travel support for the study project.

drystone walling



hay meadow quality



CAT detector



outdoor learning



pony Sam

