

Welcome

Following the resignation of Stella, due to other commitments, this is the first issue of Gate I have produced. I have to thank Stella for her considerable input to the association over the last few years and for the professional production of Gate. However you will now have to accept my much simpler version unless you can do better and want to volunteer.

Kevin

Lectures and Visits

March 31 - Send a Cow - How the charity makes a difference to third world countries.

28 April - Sue Tatman from Cheshire Wildlife Trust on Gardening for Wildlife. (The last of the meetings at Reaseheath until September)

28 June - Summer Barbeque at Gill Lawson's in Kingsley. Bring your own meat and drink and we will provide the salad, etc. Contact one of the committee for directions. Starts about 17:00. An excellent opportunity to have a chinwag and put the world to rights.

Doors open 7.30 for 8pm start. Entry £2. Notice board for ads, sales table, Tea and coffee available. Room L3/L4 The Leverhulme Centre, Reaseheath College, Nantwich, Cheshire CW5 6DF. Come early and have a chat.

DATES

April 1st - Requirement for licence for journeys with animals over 40km

May 15 - Cut off date for DEFRA receiving SPS applications

May 17/18 - Arley Horse Trials and Country Fair

June 17/18- Cheshire Show

July 30 - Nantwich Show

Aug 21 - Denbigh & Flint Show

Volunteers

We need volunteers to help man our stands at Arley and Cheshire shows, please contact Tony Moore if you can spare some time. You will get to talk to all sorts of interesting people.

Lecture Reports

January 2008 - Ask the Vet.

John Yarwood gave interesting and entertaining answers to a number of questions from the audience as well as discussing several current topics including Bluetongue and Avian Flu. We are planning to invite him again next January.

The new regulations regarding sheep tagging were discussed as well as the difficulties of persuading sheep not to remove their tags.

His comments on Bluetongue included:

Cattle - symptoms are not obvious and looks like a head cold if they get it badly;

Sheep - very susceptible with a greater infection rate than cattle, will not usually have a blue tongue;

Transmission - not from animal to animal but needs a vector (midge), we are in a vector free period at the moment (January). (Now in March we are no longer in the vector free period)

Bluetongue is here to stay and will become endemic when the midge season starts again. Horses and pigs do not get it.

Vaccinations: I will not attempt to cover the discussions on vaccinations as they were wide ranging.

John commented that he found the questions challenging as usual and the attendees all found the discussions useful.

February - Health and Safety. (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/agriculture/index.htm>)

What could have been a boring reading of legislation was an interesting presentation from Lisa Bailey of HSE. She described how we could all work more safely, giving some statistics on the causes of accidents in agriculture and answered many questions.

In agriculture from April - Dec 2007 there were 42 fatal accidents:

- Transport - 36%
- Falls from height - 13%
- Moving/unguarded machinery - 11%
- Livestock - 13%
- Other 18% (I don't know where the other 9% went. Kevin)

ATV's - 20 deaths in last 10 years

In last 10 years there were nearly 500 deaths in agriculture, 60% of these people were self-employed and 38 were children.

Of the many tips given to improve safety **some** of the main ones were:

- ATVs: - get trained on how to ride; no passengers- long seat is not for passengers; wear a helmet; check tyre pressures with proper low-pressure gauge.
- Chemicals Storage: - must be: banded to 110%; fireproof; have signage for fire brigade. An old chest freezer can be acceptable;
- Chemicals usage: read and keep safety data sheet; make and keep records of spraying. (Records need to be kept for a very long time, Lisa is checking on actual requirement)
- Manual handling: don't if at all possible; use machinery; use lifting/carrying aids; carrying small loads frequently causes a lot of problems.
- Working at heights: use professionals if possible; use correct equipment and follow safe working practices; be careful when stacking bales/silage to ensure they are safe.

Other areas covered:

- Spraying: - if born before 1964 you have grandfathered rights otherwise need chemical handling certificate.
- Asbestos: - if pre 1984 sheets are probably asbestos.
- Spraying: - HSE get a lot of complaints, hence need for records.

The above is a very brief summary of what Lisa presented and may have lost something with my summarising, the web site <http://www.hse.gov.uk/agriculture/index.htm> contains lots of helpful advice on how to work safely for all sorts of industries, a lot of which is applicable to smallholders with our diverse interests.

Apologies to John and Lisa if I have missed or misquoted any of their presentations.

An Ode to Short Journey Test by Vicky Mason

We gathered on a Saturday, full of trepidation
 We knew all that we had to know about this transportation.
 Admitted to the I.T. suite, we all were most impressed,
 Till our invigilator said that she was most distressed.
 She'd tried and tried and tried again to get logged in on-line
 The internet was working - she linked with that just fine.
 It seemed to be that Saturday was not a day for testing -
 The ether failed to give us hope - examiners were resting?
 So wearily back home we went, transporting dreams in tatters
 Still eager to disseminate our knowledge of these matters.
 Another date now hoves in view, we'll have another go,
 And hope next time to show we know what we're supposed to know?!

Chairman's Annual Report (Jan 07 - March 08)

Following my first year as chairman I thought a summary of the last year would be appropriate especially as it gives me an opportunity to have a rant and show what a Victor Meldrew I have become.

What a year it has been for smallholders:

After a very warm spring, global warming strikes and we are being told that our 4X4s are causing all the floods that characterised our summer. With hay making not possible until late August the quality was low and the prices high. We are now told that the floods were not due to global warming but were part of normal weather extremes. This has not stopped the increase in green taxes that always appear to be a tax on rural dwellers who do not have a regular bus service and smallholders who need large vehicles to tow trailers. The price of feed has gone up due to our wet weather and world wide production problems as farmers turn to green fuel crops which are more profitable. Research shows that the green fuels are not very green and may produce more CO2 than oil, but this does not stop the green subsidies. In the mean time the high cost of feed makes it difficult for all of us especially when we have to compete with cheap imported food that does not have to meet UK care standards.

Then DEFRA lived up to their Private Eye name (Department for the Elimination of Farming and Rural Affairs) when they launched an outbreak of foot and mouth on us. The most recent whitewash (sorry that should have been independent inquiry) blamed everyone involved with Pirbright but said the result was positive as all the procedures worked. However it also said that if the outbreak had been wider DEFRA and other authorities would not have been able to cope. So I am not sure why the outbreak was a success. But I am out of date - while DEFRA were responsible for managing Pirbright the "Innovation, Science, University and Skills sub-committee" is reported to have "cleared" DEFRA of "responsibility" for the FMD leak at Pirbright. So that's all right then, it was no ones fault.

Then in November we get Avian flu. The Head Veterinary Officer is reported as saying he is surprised that it occurred in a commercial operation, he expected it to occur in a small holding due to the lower bio security. Then it turns out the outbreak appears to be linked to the outbreak in Hungary where lorries from the UK site travelled and that it was not a wild bird that caused the outbreak. But no illegal activities took place so that's all right.

Then we get Bluetongue, with all the associated problems over protection zones and being in or out. As it appears inevitable that it will spread once the midges (vectors) start biting again I am not sure about the benefits of the zones. The voluntary vaccination, that farmers/smallholders have to pay for, as DEFRA has not applied to the EU for funding, is unlikely to reach the 85% take up necessary to stop further spread so we will probably end up with only one zone. Am I being too pessimistic or just cynical at the spin that appears to be present on all official communications?

At some point the report on TB in Badgers has been sidelined awaiting another report as killing badgers is not a good policy for politicians. What happened to the report that was undertaken in the 60's, was this buried as well? I am not an expert but someone somewhere in the last forty years must have determined if culling badgers would reduce the incidence of TB transmission or even, dare I mention it, if the dreaded vaccination would work. I say dreaded as DEFRA appear to be completely against vaccination for any of our current woes.

Finally, the NFU chairman is reported as saying that he believes smallholders are a threat to the "proper" farmers as they do not have to comply with the same standards. He later said he had been misquoted but if his interview was so opaque that a reporter can misinterpret his statement in such a way I am inclined to believe the reporter. We all know that we have to comply with the same standards as all farmers despite the significantly greater impact on the smallholder with a small number of different species. It would appear that the vested commercial interests are gaining ground and the only farming in the UK will be on vast intensive farms as every one else will have been regulated out of business.

In the mean time I will continue to enjoy proper free range eggs and the slow grown tasty breeds produced by CSA members confident in the knowledge that this year cannot be any worse, can it?

Finally, finally has anyone noticed the reluctance of a large number of 4X4 drivers to get their wheels dirty? I always meet them in the narrow lanes where it is necessary for one or both vehicles to get wheels onto the grass verge, invariably the 4X4 driver won't. Are they frightened they will get stuck or is the fear they may get a bit of mud on their tyres?

Finally, finally, finally (If I was capable of coherent thought I would have structured the document so there was only one finally, as Churchill or was it Lady Astor? wrote- "Sorry to send you such a long letter but I did not have time to write a short one") Private Eye have reported that the veterinary fees for abattoirs is to increase very substantially, thus sounding the death knell for even more of the smaller abattoirs and even more difficulty for small producers and more distress for animals re-

Lawrence has been busy with the DIY and has penned the following description of how he has solved the problem of gating a brook that has water levels changing with the seasons. If you have any DIY solutions to smallholders problems please let me know.

Stockproof Gate over Brook

Smallholders are also DIY enthusiasts, usually out of necessity. I have a brook running through my land and therefore a need to maintain a stock proof boundary. I have seen all sorts of solutions to this problem and noticed that they are often washed away and they then let stock through when the water level falls.

My drawing shows my solution to this. I set two 6" wooden posts in concrete, one either side of the brook. I devised a gate which could swing upwards when the brook was in spate. In times of flood, debris gets washed underneath and occasionally, even when held at about 45 degrees by the pressure of water, I have been able to walk on the frame to the other side!

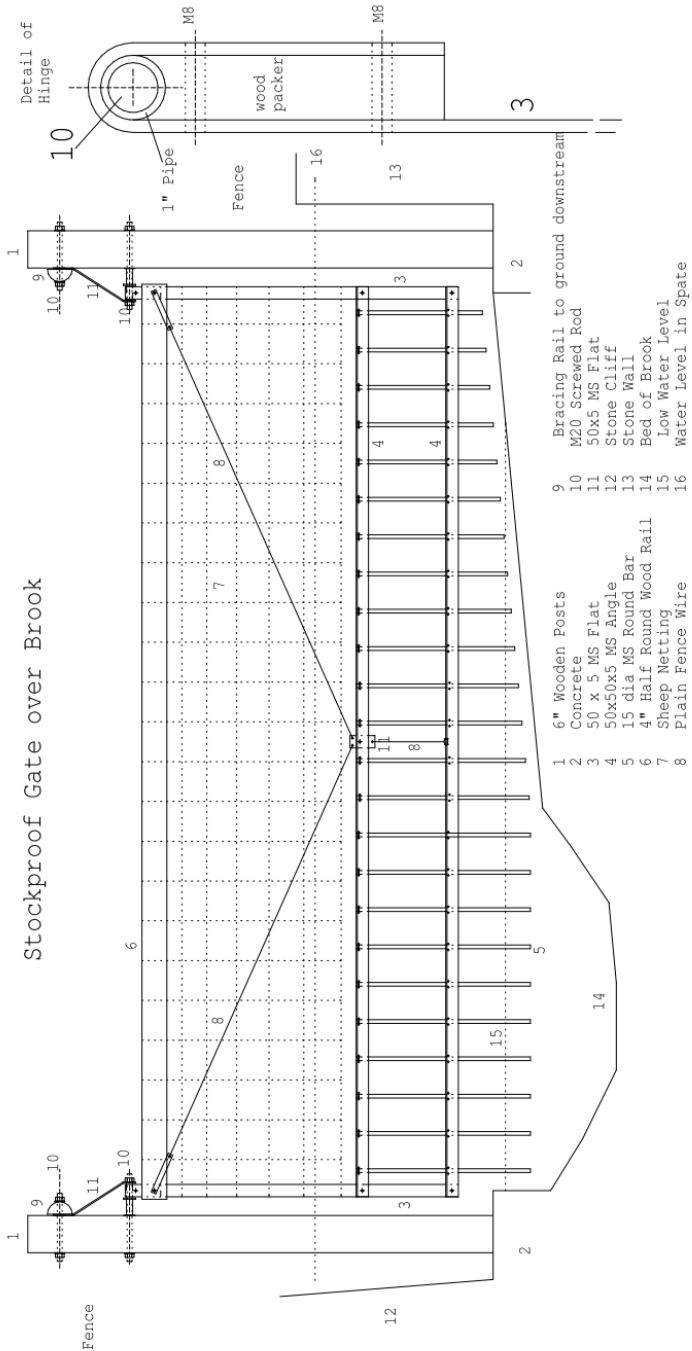
Others will probably come up with their own solutions to this problem but I have found the following features to be useful. The rods which "comb" the water are held in place by galvanised wire which can be cut easily for rod maintenance i.e. straightening and replacement. The horizontal bars of angle iron are each drilled with a pair of holes for each rod. The rods are drilled across the diameter near the top so the top wire stops the bar from falling and a twist of wire right round the rod holds it to the lower horizontal bar. I have adjusted the lengths of the rods as shown to suit the profile of the ground although it is not necessary for them to touch the bottom at the deepest part of the brook.

For both ease of assembly and manufacture, the sides of the frame are bent to form the hinges as shown in the enlarged view. Short lengths of steel pipe were threaded over the screwed rod to provide a suitable bearing surface and spacers. The half round rails which brace the posts downstream are also used to mount sheep netting (not shown) either side so that when the gate is at an angle the boundary is still stock proof. These rails also provide anchor points for a galvanised chain (also not shown) each side which prevent the gate being swung upstream by would be trespassers. I have not shown the conventional fence either side of the hanging gate. Neither have I shown two strands of barbed wire which run between the posts above the gate.

It could be asked if I would make any improvements to this design if I were to make another. After seven years in operation the only modification I would make would be to raise the horizontal bars by say 4 or 5 inches and have correspondingly longer rods. This may prevent debris from getting trapped in the rods above the lower bar.

L.E.B. Heyshead Farm 2008

Stockproof Gate over Brook



- 9 Bracing Rail to ground downstream
- 10 M20 Screwed Rod
- 11 50x5 MS Flat
- 12 Stone Cliff
- 13 Stone Wall
- 14 Bed of Brook
- 15 Low Water Level
- 16 Water Level in Spate

- 1 6" Wooden Posts
- 2 Concrete
- 3 50 x 15 MS Flat
- 4 50x50x5 MS Angle
- 5 15 dia MS Round Bar
- 6 4" Half Round Wood Rail
- 7 Sheep Netting
- 8 Plain Fence Wire

Rare Breeds Registration

The Rare Breeds Trust are asking for rare breed herds to be registered to ensure they can benefit from any special measures that may apply or come into force in the event of future Foot and Mouth outbreaks.

The Trust is compiling the register on behalf of DEFRA, SEERAD, WAGARAD and DARDNI for: Cattle, Sheep, Pigs and Goats.

See www.rbst.org.uk for more details.

Or write to:

Breeds At Risk Register
Rare Breeds Survival Trust
Stoneleigh Park, Near Kenilworth
Warwickshire, CV8 2LG
Telephone: 024 7669 8766/8763
Email: bar@rbst.org.uk

Other Stuff

Gate

The next Gate will be produced in August. Please send me any articles, pictures, adverts etc for the next issue by the end of July 08. (phone 07773780722 for email address).

Web Site

(www.cheshiresmallholders.org)
If you have any articles or adverts for the web site let me know, pictures of your activities always welcome. I will continue updating the web site so keep on looking at it for latest news.

Subscription Renewal

Subs are due in September, don't forget you can pay by standing order, this makes admin much easier.

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