

FSC does the beach

Anyone venturing along Slapton Sands during the summer could hardly fail to notice the large, shingle covered box at one end of the central car park. As the sign and flags announce, this is the FSC Slapton Ley trailer, which has drawn in thousands of visitors and locals throughout the summer holidays.



As part of a project to improve the profile of the FSC and Slapton Ley National Nature Reserve, we secured funding from Natural England and the Slapton Line Partnership for a mobile learning space, for use in the Centre grounds and further afield across the local area. Through consultation and research, this idea was refined to give us the structure we have today, a trailer for storage, which opens up to reveal all sorts of exciting displays and resources.

Touch tables of 'dead stuff' such as skulls, snake skins, and owl pellets, and a freshwater tank full of pond life from Slapton Ley have all made a massive hit. For the more creative, arts and crafts using natural beach materials have also proved popular. These activities have been led by the FSC education team.

Weather permitting, the nature reserve team and our team of volunteers can regularly be found at the trailer meeting visitors to the area, sharing information about the reserve and local wildlife, and the events that we offer at the Field Centre.

Events such as pirate attack, treasure hunts, and face painting (local wildlife of course!) have all been warmly embraced. We hope to develop these ideas and events even further next year, to include puppet shows featuring local wildlife and historic characters, giant 'rock puzzles' and much more.

Over a hundred people including children, mums, dads and grandparents visited every day that the trailer was open. So if you're ever in the area, and want to join in the fun and excitement of our beach festival, or even join us as a volunteer, come along to Slapton Sands on a sunny day in August.

And if not, who knows? We may soon be on tour at a location near you!





Start Bay goes from strength to strength

Building on the successes of last year's Open Day, the 2009 'Celebrate Start Bay' event held at FSC's Slapton Ley Field Centre on the 22nd of August surpassed all expectations, with over 1,000 people participating throughout the course of the day!

In his opening address Tony Soper described Slapton as being both special and magical, and the occasion certainly lived up to this billing; as the day's events unfolded they quite simply summed up all that is special about Start Bay, its landscape and indeed the communities that live and work there.



Margaret, left, with Helen Davies and Julie Ayling

25 years at Slapton

Bursar, Margeret Mitchelmore has spent 25 years working at the FSC's Slapton Ley Field Centre. During that time not only has the FSC been a major part of her life but she's also seen plenty of changes, with three different wardens, each bringing their own ideas. Over the years the Centre has forged closer links with the village, even hosting the doctors' surgery and WI meetings during the construction of the new village hall.

Looking back, she recalls some of the highlights and changes over the years: "One of the main differences between the student visits of the 1980s and today is that week-long visits, with all groups arriving on Friday, have now given way to visits of many different durations. So now we are always busy preparing rooms for the next set of arrivals.

"I recall the jubilation when our income first went through the £250,000 barrier! A far cry from the hectic business levels of today, when even with the new facilities we often find ourselves operating at full capacity or even beyond!

"One of the biggest advances at the Centre came with the opening of the Chell building, a 'state of the art' facility delivering 18 ensuite bedrooms, together with the redevelopment of *Whitegates* giving us two new teaching labs and additional office space. The dining room extension has enabled our staff to run a more efficient system as well as providing a much nicer place for students and staff alike.

"I have seen over 120 staff come and go during these years, and with over 5,000 students a year I have had the chance to meet many interesting people. It has been a wonderful place to work, lovely people and many staff who still come back after 25 years. Long may it prosper!"



From left • peg making with Eddie Church • pizza making workshop with Manna from Devon • Tony Soper • throwing a pot with Bob Norman of Stoke Fleming • village hall stands • Slapton Players time travels in the Slapton Timeline play. South Devon AONB unit

The energy and commitment of the exhibitors bringing such a vast range of skills, the quality of artifacts and superb local produce on display, reinforced just how fortunate we are to live in an area so rich in human and natural resources. It is difficult to identify any particular highlights of the day with such a diverse programme of events on offer, ranging from: kayaking on the Ley; making pizzas; rural skills activities; art and singing workshops; or just indulging in a Devon cream tea. In fact there was something there for everybody!

Whilst strong teamwork and a great venue were key to the success of the day, special mention and thanks should be extended to the Field Centre's Bob Troake and Steve Edmonds, to Liz Davey of the South Devon AONB, and to Alan Denbigh of the Slapton Line Partnership for their time and dedication in the planning of the event. A special thanks to Jim McPetrie for providing the car parking, and to Dan at the Tower Inn for hosting the evening events. The Centre's splendid kitchen and dining room teams deserve a mention for ensuring that

our visitors were catered for to their usual high standard.

'Celebrate Start Bay' is now becoming a firm fixture in the diary, and judging by the massive volunteer support for this year's programme, it would suggest that the community is now ready to assume a sense of ownership for the event. All those interested in supporting 2010 are invited to contact Steve (01548 580685), as next year's event will no doubt be even bigger than 2009, and your involvement is vital if we are to deliver!

Celebrating Slapton's scientific heritage... past, present and future

This year the Annual Research Seminar is to be held on Saturday 31st October as part of the Village Week celebrations.

As it is the FSC Field Centre's 50th anniversary, the programme this year has a '50 year theme'. The sessions will focus on the past, the present, and the future, with an exciting and varied range of topics for discussion.

During the morning session the various guest speakers will be reminiscing, describing their respective times and experiences at



Above: Professor Ian Mercer seen last year at the naming ceremony of the Chell and Mercer Buildings. Ian was Slapton's first warden in 1959, and will be addressing the opening session of the Seminar.



Slapton. Researchers from Bristol and Plymouth Universities will feature strongly in the middle session, describing some of the cutting edge research with which the name Slapton has become synonymous. To conclude we will be looking forward, examining the importance of scientific research in the field, and of the vital role this can often play in shaping our futures.

The venue will be Slapton Village Hall, arriving for coffee at 9.30am ready for a 10.00am start. All are welcome to attend, please contact the Field Centre to register and request a programme.

New look trails

2009 has seen the implementation of the first phase of the new Interpretive Plan for the Nature Reserve. The refurbishment of the fishing hut below Slapton Bridge has now been completed, with pride of place going to four new displays in the covered information hub.

Two information boards have a seasonal theme, featuring some of the wildlife typically seen on the Nature Reserve in the Autumn/Winter and Spring/Summer. A third board, *Secret Slapton*, highlights some of the more rarely seen wildlife, such as the secretive Otter and the iconic Dormouse, both of which regularly breed here.



The final board shows visitors where they can go to enjoy the reserve, with an aerial view describing three different walks: The Meadow Walk (1.5 miles); the Village Walk (1.75 miles); and the Valley Walk (2.5 miles). The walks are colour coded and there are 10 smart new way markers strategically positioned across the Reserve to guide visitors along the trails.

Finally, in response to popular request, there is a brand new sightings blackboard at the fishing hut, giving visitors an insight into what they are likely to see when out and about on the Reserve.



Village Week

After a hugely successful summer events programme we are happy to announce our plans for this autumn, which involve a week focussing on Slapton village, culminating in our Annual Research Seminar and 50th Anniversary celebrations.

The week will kick off with a village walk, taking in some less explored parts of the Nature Reserve down to Deer Bridge, and then back up through the heart of the village to finish at the pub for optional food and drinks.

Events throughout the week include a treasure hunt in and around the village, a coffee morning, a pub quiz and a Halloween walk listening to tales of ghosts and haunted buildings, finishing up at the Tower Inn for some ghoulish drinks!



We hope our events will appeal to all, and we would like to welcome as many people as possible to join in with our celebrations of our time here, in the lovely part of the world that is Slapton.

Slapton Village Week events October 24-31 2009

Village Walk

Saturday October 24, 10.15am-12.30pm

Start at Slapton Ley Field Centre, finish at the Queens Arms for optional food and drink
• Tea and coffee on arrival at Slapton Ley Field Centre • Event is free of charge, donations to the Field Centre welcomed

Treasure Hunt

Wednesday October 28

10.00am-12.00 noon

Clue sheet available from Slapton Ley Field Centre from 10am – 12pm
• £1 group entry • Small prizes on return

Coffee Morning

Thursday October 29

10.30am-12.00 noon

Slapton Ley Field Centre. Fundraising for Devon Air Ambulance. Slideshow and videos from the Nature Reserve

Pub Quiz

Thursday October 29, 8.00pm

Queens Arms public house, Slapton village
• £1 entry per person

Halloween Walk

Friday October 30, 7.00pm-8.00pm

Meeting at the Field Centre, on to the Tower Inn for refreshments
• Admission £5 per person, families £10

Annual Research Seminar and Slapton Ley Field Centre 50th Anniversary Celebrations

Saturday October 31, 9.30am-3.45pm

(Research Seminar)
Slapton Village Hall

For more information about Village Week please phone Slapton Ley Field Centre on 01548 580685.

Slapton Ley National Nature Reserve (NNR) is owned by Whitley Wildlife Conservation Trust and managed by the Field Studies Council's (FSC) Slapton Ley Field Centre.

Head of Centre: Andy Pratt.

Reserve Manager: Nick Binnie.



in partnership with:

SLAPTON LEY
FIELD CENTRE & NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE

