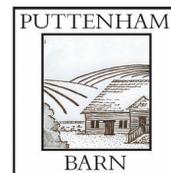


PUTTENHAM ECO CAMPING BARN

Newsletter – Spring 2018



Good-bye
YHA!

We were sorry to lose our affiliation with the YHA in 2017 – here Jonathan regretfully removes the famous 'triangle'. On the plus side, we were happy to replace it with the IH – Independent Hostels – sign.

Photos by Dave Williamson & Hilary Perry



A new event in 2017 was the **Farnham Walkfest**. In May the Surrey Hills Society led a group of people from Farnham to Guildford - the tea break at the barn was a very welcome interlude for some tired legs!

Photo by Dave Williamson

With the 2018 season approaching, we send a warm welcome to all our supporters old and new. As usual we will be opening the barn to visitors at the start of the Easter weekend. The record booking numbers in 2017 will be a hard act to follow but we are hopeful this will be another good year for our wonderful amenity.

Reflections on 2017

- As reported previously, 2017 saw a further swathe of simple accommodation being abandoned by YHA – hostels plus almost all of their Camping Barns – including our own Puttenham project. This was a huge disappointment to us as we had for many years had an excellent rapport with the YHA – they had managed our bookings from the beginnings of our venture and included us in their publicity. This generated many bookings by walkers and cyclists, the very people we aim to attract.

Several computer-savvy volunteers put their heads together to face the challenge of how to take the project further and after much hard work and consultation a new booking engine was selected – *free to book*. People finding us via our own web site would be directed to this booking engine. As a trial we also decided to advertise the barn via the accommodation web site *booking.com*.

Free to book proved to be very user friendly for the volunteer booking co-ordinators and we are happy to continue to use them for the foreseeable future, however at the end of the season the decision was made to discontinue working with *booking.com* as the site had been attracting some people who had false expectations of a camping barn.

We are currently looking at alternative web sites where we can publicise ourselves amongst outdoor people seeking overnight accommodation for their walking and cycling adventures.

- Warden coverage was generally very good during 2017 – with a bit of juggling we were able to keep the barn open for a good number of whole weeks, especially during high summer. We are extremely indebted to all our regular 'POND-trained' wardens as well as the 'Volunteer Manager' (VM) wardens – the latter coming to us via the YHA who have kindly agreed to continue to include us in their listings of wardening opportunities.

Being concerned that wardens and visitors alike enjoy their stay, we were delighted to receive positive feedback from all wardens who completed a questionnaire; the one negative comment regarding guest punctuality has been addressed. The z-bed kindly donated by Jenny Powell has also proved a great success, providing an optional "*extremely comfortable!*" second bed in the warden's room.

Reflections on 2017 - *continued*



- With frequent watering by volunteers and wardens during dry spells, the **native hedging** planted in memory of John Perry continues to thrive – in fact, not one of the 40 plants was lost!
- After much deliberation a **wi-fi** connection was set up for warden use during the season, this still needs some tweaking as regards liaison on booking information but it has been welcomed by most of our volunteer wardens
- We again participated in the **Guildford WalkFest** and **Heritage Day**. As well as welcoming people at the barn, the publicity for these events helps to make us known in the area. Volunteer Dave also brought a group of walkers from the **Staines Ramblers** to the barn for a lunch break.

Looking forward to the 2018 Season...

- The **Start-of-season work party** will take place on Saturday 17 March – if you would like to help please contact Hilary Perry.
- We are delighted to report becoming part of the international **Friends of Nature**, one of Europe's leading environmental organisations. Thus from 2018 we are honoured to join a network of over 800 eco-friendly places to stay in Europe that are “particularly suited to the walker, cyclist and country lover” and are sure this will be to the advantage of all. See www.thefriendsofnature.org.uk/houses/puttenham
- The annual ‘**Round the Hogs Back**’ **cycle ride** will take place on Sunday 10 June. As in past years, a refreshment stop at the barn is included in the route plan. Local cyclist Martin Taplin will lead the ride; for further details or questions please contact Martin on 01483 504926.

VOLUNTEERING

- As with most other charities, volunteers are constantly sought to help with the many jobs. We are particularly looking for a person/persons who would like to look after our Facebook page, resurrect Twitter and help publicise the barn in other ways such as with an article in one of the local free magazines. Please contact Hilary Perry (details below) who will be happy to have a chat.
- Additional volunteer wardens are also needed. We hope to organise a training day for new wardens in late Spring or early Summer so if this is of interest to you or a friend please speak to Hilary.

VISITORS' COMMENTS

More enthusiastic messages were added to our visitors book in 2017, the following comments show just how appreciated the barn is by passing walkers and cyclists:

- *August 2017: Thanks for a lovely stay in the camping barn – after a long day of walking it was just what we needed! Also, it's so nice that everything is so eco-friendly here – and there's so little light pollution it's great to see all the stars. Many thanks again.*
- Lottie, Sam, Ben, Sandra and Mark
- *October 2017: A great night's stopover for a cold cyclist on his way back to London. A wonderful final night on the road – thanks for having me!*
- Cameron, Adelaide, South Australia

This newsletter is published by Project Oasis North Downs, the registered charity that manages Puttenham Eco Camping Barn

Web site: www.puttenhamcampingbarn.co.uk

Contact: Hilary Perry, tel 01252 324082 or e-mail hjperry88@gmail.com