

West Countryman's Diary



With **LES DAVIES MBE**

CAN it be true that half the year has already gone? The longest day will have come and gone on June 21st and it only seems a moment ago I was putting the clocks on with the coming of British Summer time.

Ron White of Paywell Farmhouse, high on Mendip, died recently. Many will have known him, but many may not. For me Ron epitomised the 'Mendiper', he was one of the few men that still had a trace of the Mendip dialect in his speech.

He was a very knowledgeable and practical man, who seemed to be able to do everything. When I was the Mendip Warden, Ron was an indispensable ally who dealt with difficult and awkward jobs with an air of ease and confidence that always put my mind at rest. If Ron was dealing with it there would be no problems!

Sorting out water pipes and troughs, to re-surfacing tracks, Ron with his son Alan (with the digger) did it all. When Tina Bath and I built the pathway through Nether Wood in the Blackmoor Reserve at Charterhouse, it was Ron who repaired and lent us his old dumper, free of charge. He also lent us his tractor saw bench to cut up the wooden rails that edged the pathway.

I would receive his handwritten invoice for a job some period after the work had been completed. These were normally written out when the weather was bad and he couldn't get out and about to do anything else. He was always there to advise me and help on all matters concerning Mendip, and he smoothed many a set of ruffled feathers to help me out.

From him came the most valuable piece of advice that carried me on to work for myself: "Course see, we don't work for people we don't like." Another Mendiper has gone, bringing home the reality that at some time we must all do the same. Having lost a couple of friends just recently, the view that we all hang by a thread is uppermost in my thoughts.

We should therefore live each day to the full, laugh a lot and talk to each other more. Live each day as if it were your last, but care for the land as if you are going to live forever!

The Royal Bath and West show was, from my perspective, a good one, and this month's issue of *Mendip Times* will be carrying photos of those few days. My highlight was to receive the award for outstanding craftsmanship in the cider and orchard sector. After 46 years of working with apple trees this was without doubt the greatest recognition that I could have received.

There was a Royal presence at the Environmental Youth Award exhibition when Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Cornwall presented the prizes to the winning schools in this year's competition. She was not going to be rushed at all and spent time with each group, keenly listening to what they had to say, and what they hoped to do next.

This year's winners were from Wiltshire, but as always the judges had great difficulty in choosing the overall champion from such a strong field of entries. If you are part of a youth group, school, or are just a group of friends who have come together with the common aim of improving or enhancing your local environment, please take a look at our website: www.environmentalyouthaward.org It could be your group picking up the prizes next year.

I like to see livestock grazing and crops growing in the fields, so after such a wet start to this year it's pleasing to see both. The



Flower and me

Somerset Levels appear to have made a good recovery after such a bad time, and I can only hope that the lessons we have been taught are remembered. Just like the Norfolk Broads, this landscape is a product of the human impact on it. It has made it the diverse and interesting area it has become. This is also a place where people live and work.

This may not be the last time we have such weather as we experienced at the beginning of this year, perhaps climate change is starting to make itself known, and we must be prepared to change with it.

It's a busy place in the countryside at the moment, with the contracting gangs rushing to get one grass cut after another into the silage clamps. There will be a lot of 'agricultural' movements on the roads during this busy period, so be safe and be patient.

As I'm writing this month's contribution an area of high pressure is in control of our weather, giving us that sunshine we long for. June hay is being made in the fields, God is in heaven and all is well with the land. So with all this in mind it really is time to get out and about on the hill or in the valley.

If you are on the hill be aware that there will be ticks in the rough vegetation. It's been a while since I spoke on this subject, but we all need to take care. A few simple precautions can make the difference: wear long trousers and cover your arms when walking through bracken or rough vegetation. The lighter the colour the better, as you can spot the little critters hitching a ride.

Stop and check frequently so that you can brush them off if you spot any, and don't forget to do a body check at the end of the day when you have a shower. These little suckers love the soft southern parts of the human anatomy but will crawl around for quite a while before they decide to have a go at you.

Don't forget the dog either – they will be at greater risk than you as they brush up against the vegetation. Ears and noses are the favorite spots of attachment here. If you do find one of these unwanted companions about your person, use a pair of tweezers to gently ease it out. Never use anything to burn it off, as this will just lead to the creature exploding its gut into you. Not nice to hear I know, but we all need to be aware. There is plenty of advice to be found on the 'net' that will help you, and if you have concerns over a tick bite seek some medical advice.

This month's photo is one from my archive collection. June 1956 and I'm holding Flower as she waits to be harnessed ready for haymaking. Real horse power, and such a long time ago!

You can always contact me through my website: Westcountryman.co.uk