

The Birches

Community Matters Newsletter

Kingsthorpe, Much Birch, Little Birch,
Aconbury & Wormelow December 2024



CHRISTMAS PRIZE BINGO



LITTLE BIRCH VILLAGE HALL
FRIDAY 29TH
NOVEMBER
EYES DOWN AT 7:30PM

Fun for the whole family
Refreshments available



Little Birch Village Hall
Presents

Cinderella

NEW DATES
Friday 24th Jan 7pm
Saturday 1st Feb 2pm
Saturday 1st Feb 7pm
~~Saturday 15th Jan 2pm~~
~~Saturday 15th Jan 7pm~~

All ticket sales for matinee
performance on 1st Feb to go to
St Michaels Hospice



Adult Tickets £10
16 & under £5

To book tickets call
Tonya 01981 540898
Margaret 01981 540374



Carols at The Tump

Wednesday 18 December 2024
6:30 pm

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singing outside The Tump Inn, Wormelow

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Christmas



St. Mary's Church, Little Birch

We would like to thank Graham, Janet and Candice for helping with the church clean and churchyard tidy up. The extra three pairs of hands made all the difference. Some jobs at the church do not get done very often, but everything was polished, brushed, swept, cut, trimmed and looked lovely for the Harvest service the following day. The congregation of about 25 in number enjoyed light refreshments after the service and it was nice to see a good turn out to celebrate this important time of the year.

The Remembrance Sunday service also had a congregation of about 25 to remember the sacrifices made on our behalf and we would like to thank Annie for once again doing a wonderful display around the font and also the wreath. Once again it is much appreciated.

Our Christmas tree is once again being donated by Grafton Lane Christmas trees. Thank you. The tree will be dressed on Saturday 30th November at 4pm. Please come along and give us a hand and enjoy a cup of hot chocolate. If you have any surplus baubles, decorations or lights, we can always use them. Children are experts at tree decorating so bring your parents or grandparents along. On Sunday 22nd December at 4pm will be our beautiful candle lit Christingle service, this is a truly magical service for children and one not to be missed. Our Christmas day service to celebrate the birth of Jesus will be at 11am, giving you time to open a present or two before you come. Wishing you all a very happy and healthy Christmas and New Year. Thank you to everyone for the support that you give us.

Millenium Green Celebration

The Millenium Green at Wormelow is 25 years old on Wednesday 1st January 2025 and Rosemary Rigby invites all to bring and plant bulbs from 2pm which will create spring colour for years to come. Bring a spade or trowel if you can. It may be muddy so wellies would be a good idea.

Community Governor

Would you like to help Much Birch C of E Primary School and St. Mary's Primary School Credenhill continue to flourish? If so, we are looking for people who live in the Much Birch/Much Dewchurch/Little Birch area who would become a community Governor and join the Governing Body.

You don't need specific educational experience but it could be relevant. If you are keen to see our schools continue to deliver a great education to the children of our area and beyond and have a few hours a month free, we would welcome you.

Please have a chat with Revd Mark on 07882410759 or in person to see what the role entails and how your experience and skills can help.

The Birches Newsletter is also available online at
www.littlebirchparishcouncil.org



Fungi Walk by Amanda Heaps

On 30th October a group of 20 gathered outside Little Birch village hall, keen to learn about fungi. Knowledgeable guides from Herefordshire Fungus Survey Group led us to Aconbury Woods. We spotted our first fungus by the parish field and learnt how to identify them from different coloured gills on the underside of the fungus cap and from the spores. Some fungi had a sponge like appearance under their caps rather than gills. Others were like little balls, stalks or fans. Most of the fungi we found were growing on dead wood or in the path.- nearly 20 sorts of fungi including a bright yellow one, a bit like seaweed.

We returned to the village hall for tea and cake provided by Wendy and Cathy and a very interesting display about fungus from the survey group.

Many thanks to Chris Fowler for organising this walk and to Mike and Shelly Stroud, Jo Weightman, David Williams from the Hereford Fungus Survey Group for sharing their time and expertise with us.

English Names for the Fungi Seen

Ringless Honey Fungus, Yellow Staghorn, Clouded Funnel, Frosty Funnel, Roundspored Oysterling, Sulphur Tuft, Common Funnel, Mild Milkcap, Twig Parachute, Common Bonnet, Milking Bonnet, Bark Bonnet, Snapping Bonnet, Common Stump Brittlestem, Butter Cap, Bracken Map, Sycamore Tarspot, Common Earthball, Hairy Curtain Crust, Turkey tail, Scurfy Twiglet, and Candlesnuff Fungus.

Coffee Morning with Book Exchange Little Birch Village Hall Thursday 5th & Saturday 21st December 10-12 noon

Enjoy a cup of tea or coffee, some cake or biscuits. Make new friends, catch up with old friends. Take a book, leave a book or both.
Families & well behaved dogs welcome

Table Tennis Tuesday 3rd December Little Birch Village Hall 7-9pm £3

Join us at the
Community Café
 @ Much Birch Community Hall

Saturday 14 December 2024
10:00 - 12:30

and every 2nd Saturday of the month

11 January 2025

8 February

8 March

For more information or if you are in need of transport contact Lydia on 01981 540323 or socialfabric@hotmail.com



A local group who want to bring people together, strengthen community links and provide relaxed and fun events for all ages.

King's Thorn and Little Birch Garden Show

Saturday 7th September saw the Little Birch Village Hall open its doors to the many exhibitors with flowers, vegetables, cakes and bakes, handicraft items, vegetable monsters, gardens on a plate, gingerbread men and other delightful exhibits. 33 exhibitors brought 213 items, once again producing the most magnificent displays - showing just how talented the local community is. The hall looked bright and beautiful.

The judges awarded 1st, 2nd and 3rd prizes with many shields, cups and plates all going to worthy winners including the Family Headley – Llewellyn Sutton Cup, Des Wathen – the Harold Salisbury Shield, Tim Headley - the Horticultural Shield & the Selby Lloyd Shield, Tim Headley & Janet Gwinnett – Rose Bowl, Janet Gwinnett – the Floral Art Shield, Des Wathen - David Enoch Cup, Anne Harper - Domestic Cup & Wilson Cup, Jemima Webb – Children's Shield and Over 8 winner, Jack Hall – Anne Thomas Trophy and Under 8 winner. Well done to everyone.

The Photography Plate went to Chloe Whistance and the Painting Plate to Wendy Hall. The Garden Club thanks those who donated raffle prizes - the Axe & Cleaver, the Pilgrim Hotel, Pengethley Garden Centre, Allensmore Nurseries and Carrot & Wine Stores. We look forward to 2025 when the Show will be on Saturday 6th September. Put it in your diaries now and start planning what you can enter! Whether you are a novice gardener or a seasoned one, all entries are greatly welcomed.

Other Gardening Club News

We meet on the last Wednesday of each month in Little Birch Village Hall at 7.30pm to 9pm with tea and biscuits. A great way to meet new people, and have a chat with other gardeners and swap ideas & tips . All welcome.

Happy Gardening! Lesley Chapman,
King's Thorn & Little Birch Show & Club Secretary

Photography Group

We are a friendly local group who are keen and enjoy our imaging skills. We invite anyone who has an interest in taking photos to come and join us. You will be made very welcome. For more information please contact Sally Nichol. tel. 07803 032928 01981 540001

Art and Craft Space

We meet every Thursday afternoon 2 until 4 at Little Birch Village Hall at the top of Barrack Hill HR2 8AZ.

We bring along our own projects and have a monthly theme. Feel free to do your own projects. You don't have to follow the themes if you would rather do something else. For more information please contact Sally Nichol tel. 07803 032928 01981 540001 email sally.nichol@btinternet.com



at Much Birch
 Community Hall

Thursday 12 December - THE HOLDOVERS 15

A curmudgeonly instructor at a New England prep school remains on campus during Christmas break to babysit a handful of students with nowhere to go. He soon forms an unlikely bond with a brainy but damaged troublemaker, and with the school's head cook, a woman who just lost a son in the Vietnam War.

Starring Paul Giamatti, Tate Donovan, Carrie Preston

Next month...

Thursday 23 January 2025 — SWEDE CAROLINE 15

Tickets £5 (£4 under 16s)

Refreshments including hot dogs and ice cream available from 7pm

Tickets available in advance or on the door (cash or card payments accepted)- for further info or to book tickets please email muchbirchflicks@hotmail.com or call 01981 540097

For further information about films and screenings visit www.artsalive.co.uk

FLICKS IN THE STICKS

FLICKS IN THE STICKS



Spinning and Weaving Magic

When Wendy Fowler's children were little she joined an adult education pottery class and then went on to train at Langley College. She loved creating pots so much that she and her husband, Chris, built a workshop in their garden in High Wycombe in which Wendy produced many garden pots and water features selling at craft fairs and art exhibitions all over the country as well as teaching pottery to dozens of adults and children over more than thirty years.

Wendy is also a very accomplished spinner and weaver making woven scarves, tea towels and blankets and her own hand spun yarn. When Wendy and Chris moved to Kingsthorpe Wendy brought more than 150 of her garden pots with her. Her main focus these days is on spinning and weaving. She belongs to a local group of spinners, weavers and dyers. The exquisite results of her work adorn the walls of their house.

In the Bleak Midwinter

by Christina Rossetti

In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan

Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone

Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow

In the bleak midwinter, long ago.

Our God, Heaven cannot hold him, nor earth sustain:

Heaven and earth shall flee away when he comes to reign.

In the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed

The Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ.

Anne Rooke



We are saddened to report the death of Ann Rooke, aged 77, who lived all her life in Little Birch and was well known to local residents as a larger than life figure, always known to be smiling and happy to chat. Ann worked in Chadds department store until it closed. She then settled into retirement. Unfortunately Ann spent just under 2 years in a residential home, but even there they loved her happy disposition. Ann's funeral took place on 19th November.

Caron Hitching



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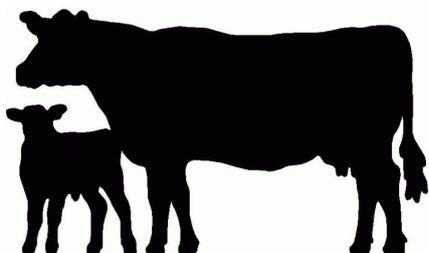
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Contact Lucy for more information
on 07974 053804
or email lucymason@hotmail.com
Merrivale Farm Little Birch
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Items for **January** newsletter to
editorial@birchesnews.org.uk or paper
copy to Elisabeth Taylor 0785 4 629193 by
8th December

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Much Birch Parish Council

At the Much Birch Parish Council Meeting held in Much Birch Community Hall on the 7th November there was a discussion about local flooding in the parish roads and byways. The parish council would try to arrange for a drainage person plus a public rights of way inspector to take a look at the situation regarding local drainage provision and highway surfacing etc.

The parish council can now co-opt a new councillor for the Much Birch Parish Council. Please contact your local councillors, or the clerk, for more details or come along to the next parish council meeting at the Much Birch Community Hall on December 5th from 7.30pm to find out more. All are welcome to attend.

Meetings in 2025: January 9th, February 6th, March 6th, April 3rd, May 8th, June 5th, July 3rd, no meeting in August, September 4th, October 2nd, November 6th, December 4th

Please see notice boards and website for agendas. Public and press are welcome to attend the meeting and will have the opportunity to speak directly to their councillors. Full minutes of the meetings and information can be found on the Parish Council website following the link found at www.muchbirchparish.org.uk.

You can also find us on X (formerly known as Twitter) at <https://twitter.com/MuchBirchPC> and Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/Much.Birch.Parish>

Much Birch Parish Councillors

Cllr Alison Cook (Chair) Jasmine Cottage, Wrigglebrook Lane, Kingsthorpe HR2 8AW, thecoops@wyenet.co.uk
01981 540703

Cllr Roisin Burge The Old Hall, Barrack Hill, Little Birch HR28AX roisinburge@hotmail.com 01981 540840

Cllr David Irwin, 5 The Old Mushroom Farm, Much Birch, Hereford, HR2 8HY **Tel: 07766 135068**
email David.Irwin13@btinternet.com

Cllr Chris Pickering-Grey 4 Court Farm Barns, Much Birch HR2 8HT chris@pickering-grey.uk 07712 813218

Cllr Michael Agyeman Little Willow, Wrigglebrook Lane, magyeman92@gmail.com

Parish Clerk Mrs Alison Wright Longfield House, Gooses Foot, Kingstone HR2 9NE muchbirchclerk@gmail.com
01981 250860

Minutes of meetings www.muchbirchparish.org.uk.

Little Birch Parish Councillors

Cllr Steve Coles Cllr Tom Palfrey

Cllr Chris Atkinson Cllr Nick Deacon

Neil Barrington, clerk lbpcclerk@gmail.com

Website www.littlebirchparishcouncil.org

Little Birch Parish Facebook Group

Find the latest news, events & business listings all in one place. You are welcome to promote your local business, advertise a local event or post news or information of interest to the village and local area.

Footpath Officers

If you have any queries about footpaths contact:

Little Birch and Aconbury

Chris Fowler chrisfowler1@hotmail.co.uk
07931 292998

Much Birch including Kingsthorpe:

David Irwin david.irwin13@btinternet.com
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Is it time to learn some simple relaxation tools to let go of unhelpful learned behaviours?

Is it time to change your relationship with yourself?

My work led me around the world teaching individually and as a course leader offering WorkShops (or maybe RestShops!) to slowly soften, unwind and return home to ourselves, allowing our bodies to rest and our minds to slow down through profound yet simple relaxation practices. Maybe it's time to give yourself these easily learned gifts?

I hold regular small afternoon groups as well as individual sessions in my Garden Studio in Little Birch.

If you know you need to dial down please get in touch 07985 252166

Upcoming events : Deep Relaxation afternoons @ Little Birch Village Hall 2 December.

Areas of interest and training include Yoga, Yin Yoga, Vinyasa Yoga, Reflexology, Fascia Release, Wheel of Consent, Shamanic Practices including Sweat Lodges and Women's Wisdom Circles.



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Jobs to Do in the Garden during December

At the time of writing this we are experiencing a welcome mild Autumn with, so far, just one slight frost followed by a number of foggy and cloudy days. There have been plenty of opportunities to trim hedges and shrubs and also to have a general clear up.

A new bonfire – avoiding hibernators – was built and lit on November 5th and luckily the little bit of wind that there was blew the smoke away from us and our near neighbours. The grass is growing well and where it is not infested with moss looks lush and green so I feel a cut coming on in December.

What can we do in December?

*In mild dry weather, and only if necessary, cut the lawn with blades high leaving 35 – 50 mm of grass.

*Dahlias and Agapanthus left in the ground to over winter will need a thick mulch of compost and/or chipped bark.

*Move Orchids to an East facing window. Other indoor plants may benefit from being put in a lighter position but away from radiators.

*All tender potted plants should be in a greenhouse or shed by now.

*If not already done, bubble wrap the inside of the greenhouse at the beginning of the month.

*Prune climbing roses.

*Vent the greenhouse on warmer days to reduce condensation.

*Rhubarb can be split. Leave the crowns on the surface so that they get frosted and then plant out in early Spring.

*Prune established blackcurrants removing one third of branches at base

*Salad crops can be sown in a greenhouse but will be slow growing due to the low light levels. Watch out for slugs.

*Check stored potatoes, and also apples – dispose of any rotten potatoes and put rotting apples out for the birds.

*Put out a variety of food for birds – seeds, fat balls, stale cheese and pieces of apple and pears.

*If you have nest boxes, clean out any previous nests or thatch and put a small amount of hay, straw or wood shavings in the bottom before securely re-hanging them.

Happy Gardening Derek Scrivens



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Easter Father's Day Mother's Day
New Year Valentine's Day**

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News from Merivale Farm

Well here we are, I last wrote an update in February. Doesn't time fly?

The first thought in my head is about the progress of the heifers we imported from Denmark, which seems such a short time ago, but several of them have already calved for the second time. They only arrived on the 19th October 2023, as in calf heifers, so haven't wasted any time producing their second calf. I see in my last article I said they are all much calmer now. That's now not the case as some of them are still very nervous if you try to do anything with them individually. As a result, as much as possible we try to leave them alone.

We seem to have managed to complete all of our field work during this summer (the summer that never was!). We have made 4 cuts of grass silage and a cut of whole crop (peas and barley that are harvested while still green). There are issues with silage quality this year as a lack of sunshine meant the sugars were low. Thankfully we grow a crop of fodder beet which is very high in energy which will help to compensate this.

Now we have rented additional land which has completed its Organic Conversion, we can grow arable crops which are also fed to the cows and reduces what we need to buy in. The winter oats were combined and the straw baled on 5th August. Yields were poor due to the very wet winter. The wheat was combined on 30th August, this was rather late as crops struggled to ripen due to the weather. It then rained so we failed to bale the wheat straw until weeks later. We tedded it several times to try and dry it out which reduced the yield each time, but at least we baled some.

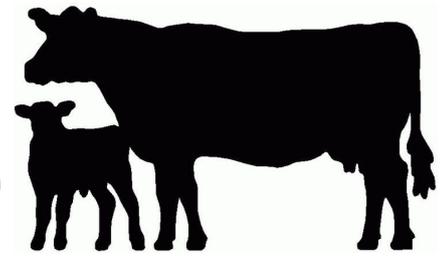
The availability of straw was forecast to be a huge problem this year due to the weather having such a terrible effect on crop yields. We just hope we have enough to see us through the winter.

No problems with watering our vegetables in this year! Weeds have grown amazingly in the wet of course, so lots of weeding. One issue this year is with the sprouts. I've been picking them for weeks and I should have only just started them now. Will there be any left at Christmas?

I now return to news of our Danish heifers. The 33 heifers produced 22 healthy Holstein heifer calves. As these were surplus to requirements, we couldn't house them for the winter so we sold them at Market Drayton auctions which specialises in dairy cattle sales. They didn't sell well as the spread of the Bluetongue virus is having a significant effect on trade. If a farm is placed in a restriction zone they can buy cattle in but not sell them on again, so farmers rearing cattle to sell on are reluctant to buy.

Our TB test is due at the end of November, you will know from my previous articles the problems that TB causes us. Will we regret selling these heifers? It's all a bit of a lottery balancing having enough followers and not having too many when the test results are so uncertain.

We are thankfully up to date with our field work, having eventually drilled the winter wheat on 1st November. The field has been covered in pigeons since, so we hope it germinates soon



and the slugs leave it alone. There is so much out there trying to thwart our best efforts! We have to be very grateful for the dry weather of the last couple of weeks, lets hope winter continues to be kind to us.

All the best from all of us at Merrivale for Christmas and the New Year, Sue

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.
The stars in the sky looked down where he lay,
The little Lord Jesus asleep in the hay.

The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
But little Lord Jesus no crying he makes.
I love Thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky
And stay by my cradle til morning is nigh.



We are Farming Minds registered charity has been set up by farmers for farmers to tackle mental health in the farming community within Herefordshire.

How can we help?

24 Hour Support Line:

We run a **FREE 24 hour Support Line 7 days a week** for farmers and their families within Herefordshire who are feeling distressed and need someone to talk to anonymously.

Counselling:

We provide **fully funded counselling to anyone in the Herefordshire farming community** who may be in emotional distress.

Training:

We offer **FREE mental health awareness training** to anyone living or working in or with the farming community in Herefordshire.

Social Events:

We run a series of **FREE social events throughout the year** to break the isolation often felt by the farming community in Herefordshire.

Befriending:

Befriending volunteers offer companionship and support to people who are isolated and lonely – they may visit you at home and/or phone for a regular chat. A befriender can offer conversation and a listening ear to those that need it.



'Taking the bull by the horns' to tackle Mental Health in the farming community

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The Rarest Present!

Every year, it seems, there is a shortage of a particular gift. Something, often unexpected, seems to catch children’s imaginations and all they can ask for is this one particular thing. And, being good parents who want the best for our children, we may go and hunt high and low and scour the internet to get one. Sometimes these presents become the thing that defines that Christmas. But often, the presents seem to fall out of favour just as quickly.

So what lasts about Christmas? Maybe memories of the meal, of everyone gathered around the table? Maybe the things that went wrong? Who burnt the sprouts – tales that become part of family Christmas folklore. But from my perspective, Christmas is more than this, more than a meal, more than presents, more than a frosty winter morning. It goes back to a tale of a baby, born in a foreign city to a young mother, surrounded by strangers. It goes back to

that alternate of Jesus—Emmanuel. God is with us. The Prince of Peace, born in a warring Empire to show a new way to live, to reveal God’s love and to inspire people, up and down the land, that love is shown in more than presents, more than meals, but in service to one another, living out the love of God, revealed on Christmas Day.

**Wishing you a happy Christmas
and a blessed 2025
Revd Mark**

Services across the churches for December

Sunday, December 1st (Advent Sunday)	9.15 a.m. at Much Dewchurch – Holy Communion
	11.00 a.m. at Little Birch – Holy Communion
	4.00 p.m. at Much Birch Community Hall – Advent Carols and Toasted Marshmallows
Sunday 8th December (2nd Sunday of Advent)	9.15 a.m. at Much Birch – Holy Communion
	11.00 a.m. at Little Birch - Morning Worship
Sunday 15th December (3rd Sunday of Advent)	9.15 a.m. at Much Birch – Morning Worship
	11.00 a.m. at Little Birch – Holy Communion in Traditional Language
Wednesday 18th	6.30 p.m. at Much Birch – Christmas Carols with Much Birch Primary School Choir
Saturday 21st	4.00 p.m. at Much Dewchurch – Carols and Christingle
Sunday 22nd (4th Sunday of Advent)	4.00 p.m. at Little Birch – Carols and Christingle
Tuesday 24th – Christmas Eve	3.00 p.m. at Much Birch – Crib service
	5.00 p.m. at Llanwarne – Christingle Service
	11.30 p.m. at Dewesall – Midnight Mass
Wednesday 25th – Christmas Day	9.15 a.m. at Much Dewchurch – Holy Communion
	11.00 a.m. at Little Birch – Holy Communion
Sunday 29th (1st Sunday after Christmas)	10/30 a.m. at Llandinabo – Holy Communion

Diary Dates December 2024

Christmas Prize Bingo 29th Nov	p1
Table Tennis Tues 3rd LBVH	P2
LBPC Wed 4th LBVH	p6
MBPC Thurs 6th MBCH	p6
Coffee & Books Thurs 5th LBVH	p2
Flicks MBCH Thurs 12th	p3
Community Café Sat 14th MBCH	p2
Carols 18th	p1
Coffee & Books Sat 21st LBVH	p4
Bulb planting 1st Jan	p2
Cinderella 24th Jan/1st Feb	p1

Advertising Rates

11 editions per year (no August newsletter)

1/16 page £4.20 per issue or £42 per year

1/8th page £4.80 per issue or £48 per year

¼ page £5.40 per issue or £54 per year

½ page £9.60 per issue or £96 per year

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Defibrillator Locations

IN A LIFE THREATENING EMERGENCY CALL 999

AEDs available to use locally for those experiencing sudden cardiac arrest. A defibrillator is an easy to use, medical device that analyses the heart's rhythm and, if needed, delivers an electrical shock (defibrillation) to help the heart establish an effective rhythm.

Allensmore Locks Garage

Backney on the garage wall at Market Gardens Cottage

Bridstow on the outside of the village hall

Garway on the wall outside the Garway Moon pub

Harewood End at Harewood End Inn on outside of the pub at the back in the beer garden.

Little Birch on the outside of the village hall

Llanwarne on the wall by steps leading up to the village hall

Much Birch on the outside of the church hall

Much Birch Axe & Cleaver on the side of the pub

Much Dewchurch outside Steiner School, first building after the church

Peterstow at the Yew Tree pub

Sellack on the outside of the parish hall (key code needed)

St Weonards old BT phone box off the A466 between the church and Forge Cottage

Wormelow at the Cricket Club & Carrot & Wine shop

Wilton on wall at the BP garage on the roundabout



MuchBirchslow
flowyoga

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SLOW FLOW YOGA

Improve strength and flexibility & also benefit from the Relaxation

Tuesdays
6:00- 7:00 PM
at Much Birch Village Hall

£8 for drop in

£35 for 5 passes

For Booking: Follow QR code
Or email: Evenstaryogahfd@gmail.com

A calming flowing yoga class with time for relaxation.
Suitable for beginners to more experienced yogis. You can gain flexibility, strength and a sense of relaxation in this welcoming yoga session.



More Information: Tel Arwen on 07503 199 972

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Tracks and Trails of Kenya by Eric Joseph

1st October 2024: A holiday with a difference! usually I spend a lot of time planning but this year we have decided to let somebody else take the strain , so to speak.

Step in, Titan Travel, the door to door specialists.

Kenya seems good - a Safari even. Let's do that then. A trip down to the Callow to have a chat with our favourite travel company, Allseasons Travel, and our mate Dave, who has done all our bookings over the years.

9 days along the "Tracks and Trails of Kenya", visiting the Maasai Mara, Amboselli and Tsavo national parks. That's what we want Dave, fix it for us please. Sure enough that's exactly what he did, which is why on the 1st October at around 3am we were packed and waiting for our ride to Heathrow airport. We chose Titan because they pick you up at your door and deliver you to the airport and the reverse on the trip home. No hassle!

Our driver takes us straight through to terminal 5. We fly with BA on flight BA65. We check in at 06.45 and we are in the air at 09.45. I was a bit disappointed that we had middle seats because as it's a day time flight I was hoping for a window so that I could watch the country below.

After eight and a half hours we arrived at Nairobi airport, had the usual security checks that dragged on, then on to collect our baggage at the gondola and outside to be met by our guide Lennox. It probably took another thirty minutes before the rest arrived from the plane. On this tour we were nineteen in all. It was dark, when we drove off - apparently it gets dark close to 18.30 every night and is light around 06.30 every morning.

Our experience started with a drive through Nairobi to our hotel, terrific traffic and road works all the way— construction every where! 45 minutes later we arrive at the Tamarind Tree Hotel. After the long flight, we did not need the shambles that there was allocating rooms. It just went on and on. Got to bed about 23.00.

We are here, the adventure starts now ! Breakfast, we gather for a chat and Lennox, our guide, sorts us out. We will be travelling in a convoy of four Toyota Land Cruisers. Doe and I ended up in a group of three, so we will be five in our truck.

Today we have a long drive to the Maasai Mara, but first we must cross " The Rift Valley" I love my geography and first heard of the Rift Valley in school. Now we are actually driving through it! The Rift Valley runs for 4300 miles from the Red Sea down into Africa and to cross it we have to drop 2500 feet.

All very interesting, but the road through there carries a constant line of traffic—mainly lorries of all sorts of fitness, massively overladen by our standards. The next country along is Uganda. It is land locked so everything comes in by lorry from Kenya's port of Mombassa.

The road down to the valley is pretty good, but has huge amount of traffic crawling along, watching the brakes going down while the other way there are masses of lorries crawling back up the hill, so passing was quite a problem. But we made it! Then it took us four and a half hours to cross the valley and get up the other side.

We passed through lots of small towns with shacks.

