

PENRITH AND NORTH LAKES U3A VISIT, 2022

A good number of members signed up for this year's visit with the option of coming on either or both of the venues: The Sunbeams Trust centre near Rheged on the outskirts of Penrith and Lowther Castle where innovative farming methods are being introduced with a focus on conservation and the use of environmentally sensitive methods. Unfortunately, the plan could not be carried through as on the very morning we were due at the Sunbeams Trust, a drainage problem had emerged and it was not possible for us to attend. It is hoped that a visit can take place at a future date.

The second event of the day could still go ahead, so the group was able to meet Jim Bliss who had spoken at our April monthly meeting and see how the estate is introducing its new methods. This turned out to be most interesting and we were fortunate to be outside on a beautiful summer's day. After an introduction describing the new techniques being implemented, we were taken into part of the castle to see the 1809 painting of Lowther by JMW Turner when Lowther Castle was being built. Jim told us that in some ways the landscape Turner portrayed is a model for the type of landscape now being developed.



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Beavers have been re introduced and we were shown where they are at work building dams and creating and maintaining habitats where an abundance and diversity of life can flourish. Dams prevent soil eroded from fields from being lost to the sea. Carbon and nutrients are trapped, improving water quality downstream. The flow of water is slowed, helping to ameliorate flooding. Regenerative management, along with the husbandry of much of the park, is being substantially de-intensified. Instead of physical fences computer controlled zones are used to designate the area where the stock may graze. , small graziers are being replaced by large ones, stock is being managed in an entirely different, more sustainable way. This is to promote a more natural environment where biodiversity and species richness increases. To promote natural regeneration and create a more diverse range of habitats for our birds, insects and mammals, we use our graziers as ecosystem engineers.

Walking over to the gardens we were guided to the viewing area overlooking the Lowther valley stretching down towards Bampton. The longhorns below were clearly visible in a line.



Jim Lowther is an enthusiastic bee-keeper and Jim Bliss has been co-opted to assist with the large number of hives they now have. A diversity of flowers is a great means of encouraging them to produce plenty of honey with a range of flavours, so encouraging the growth first of yellow rattle to suppress the grass and then a wide range of species is important.



Wild flower meadow near Helton

Altogether the visit was very interesting and it will be interesting to keep returning to watch the development of this estate.

