

## **Exercise Centurion Challenge**

### **Royal Logistic Corps (23 Pioneer Regiment)**

**7<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> May 2008**

#### **Background**

In early February the Royal Logistic Corps approached HWHL to offer the services of 100 soldiers over a four-day period at the beginning of May. It was looking for projects to test the regiment's artisan skills prior to a charity walk the following week along the National Trail in support of the Army Benevolent Fund. The short lead-in time presented an operational challenge, not least because of the need to obtain Scheduled Monument Consent for any works within the Scheduled Monument Area. However, following the National Trail's autumn condition survey, a report prepared for English Heritage in December 2007 presented an opportunity to undertake a number of important tasks within Guardianship sites coincident with the Trail.

The idea was discussed with Michael Wilson, English Heritage's landscape manager, and an initial office-based meeting arranged with Major Comer of the Royal Logistic Corps (RLC). HWHL introduced a stable of projects, drawn mainly from the condition survey report, which was presented in paper form. Also discussed was the RLC's walk along the National Trail; this would take place between 12<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> May and involve 300 members of the Regiment. The obvious concerns about the conservation of the monument were discussed, reinforced by the fact that the rainfall to date in 2008 had been above the long-term mean, something . To the RLC's credit Major Comer agreed to any conditions, including diversions and avoidance of certain sections of the Wall, that we imposed.

Overall the meeting proved promising although a number of tasks were rejected by the RLC because they failed to match the Regiment's skills. Two field-based surveys were then undertaken in March by the National Trail team (one involving English Heritage) and a revised list of proposed projects, including two in Newcastle and Carlisle, outwith the Guardianship areas, submitted to the RLC. They were provisionally accepted, subject to a field recce by the RLC, but this proved difficult to arrange and it took place only two weeks prior to the actual project.

There followed a frenetic period of detailed planning. English Heritage had previously asked HWHL to project manage all the projects, including those outwith the Trail (Chesters Roman Fort and Chesters Roman bridge abutments), also purchase materials and equipment hire. These functions were detailed in the project design for each task.

The planning for the regimental walk included initially several diversions and two sections of road walking. April's incessant rainfall, however, thankfully stopped and a three week period of dry weather enabled these restrictions to be relaxed. There

were only four minor diversions for the event, marshalled by National Park and HWHL staff and volunteers, and the RLC fully complied with a request that the groups walk four or five abreast.

## **The Tasks**

### **Wincomblee (Walker, Newcastle)**

- **Task:** Removal of art installation. Timber and brickwork to be removed from site and area levelled.

### **St Anthony's Point (Newcastle)**

- **Task:** Re-building of brick retaining walls (2 sites)

### **Planetrees (East of Chollerford)**

- **Task:** Remove post-and-wire fence (approx. 80m) around short section of HW, also stile. Concrete pad at base of stile sits on surface only and should be easily removed.

### **Chesters bridge abutments path (Chollerford)**

- **Task:** Rotavate top surface of path approx 400m length leading to Bridge Abutments site and rake over and flatten with plate vibrator.

### **Chesters Roman Fort (Chollerford)**

- **Task:** Rotavate 170m path, top dress footpath from museum/shop towards fort with 5 tonnes of dolorite pipe bedding. Compact surface material with plate vibrator.
- Replenish various sites hard standing area with 6 tonnes of pea gravel.

### **Brocolitia**

- **Task:** Re-surface Trail/Guardianship access path from car park (140m x1.0m - check) with Whin dust (5mm down) as far as exposed stones.
- Removal approximately 400m of damaged fence at eastern end of field leaving in place strainer posts. Cut off posts (some timber, some metal) at base.

### **Cawfields**

- **Task:** Set approx 3m<sup>2</sup> of flagstones in erosion pinch point area around interpretation panel. RLC to supply labour to assist with fetch of stones from nearby Walltown depot.
- Remove western most section of redundant fencing (100m). All posts including strainers to be removed. Posts that lift without effort from the ground to have holes back-filled with mole hill soil, otherwise to be cut away at base leaving no trip hazards.

- Removal of stile and timber fence at top of steps leaving strainer and supporting strut. Fill pinch point with nearby available stones and mole hill soil.
- Then remove approx 170m of fencing further on to the East, leaving strainers but removing all other posts in same way as above. Remove second stile, leaving fence that crosses Hadrian's Wall.
- The third stile, which is located in a fence line that joins Hadrian's Wall, is to be removed, with the timber posts removed.
- Turret 200m further to the east. Remove turves growing in pea gravel and use to repair pinch point wear around interpretation panel.

### **Gilsland**

- **Task:** Patch repair 4 x muddy pinch points in 100m section of fenced path running alongside railway line west of Poltross Burn Milecastle using 1-2 tonne coir-sand. Loose mud to be removed and deposited over nearby wooded slope.

### **Willowford Farm**

- **Task:** Repair eroded footpath using coir-sand. Remove edges of turf path from Wall and fence sides so as to create a clean edge and level surface to contain the coir-sand. Turf growing against the Wall to be carefully pared away using plastic spades.
- Fill two turrets with 1 tonne each of pea gravel.

### **Carlisle**

- **Task:** Removal of redundant security fencing along Trail at Willowholme.

### **Findings**

On the whole the project was a huge success with the benefits being felt within the Pioneer Regiment, along the Trail, at English Heritage Guardianship Sites and indeed for personal development within the Trail Team of HWHL.

HWHL were extremely impressed with the flexibility of the Regiment in taking advice and guidance with reference to Trail diversions, task specifications and the archaeological considerations we informed them of during the planning stages.

There was however, slight disappointment with the Press coverage with some of the local media uninterested in covering the story as the work to the Trail was not being carried out by a local Regiment!

## Lessons Learned

- To organise an event on such scale again, a longer lead in time would be preferred as various consents and permissions needed to be granted before undertaking some of the practical work along the Trail e.g. Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC), landowner permissions.
- Clearer chains of command between HWHL project supervisors on site would be beneficial for any future similar events.
- Working with such a large group posed issues over instructions being interpreted in very different way. Having any job specifications, trail diversions or task details written down proved the best method for ensuring that our instructions were followed correctly. Verbal instruction was open to individual interpretation.

## Project Benefits

- **Conservation of the Monument and National Trail Path**  
The Regiment were all briefed on the history of the Trail, the importance of the World Heritage Site and indeed what to do in the event of finding something of archaeological significance whilst working or walking. They were also very receptive to the advice given regarding walking the Trail in protecting the Monument. They walked in 10 groups of 30 and walked 1- 6 abreast on the most sensitive sections to avoid any damage to the path surface.
- **Improving landscape value**  
The artisan tasks which were completed have significantly improved the landscape value for Trail walkers. There are now 5 fewer stiles along the National Trail Path rendering it easier going for our Trail walkers. Hundreds of meters of redundant fencing have been removed which leaves the landscape looking less cluttered. This also limits the number of sheep rubbing posts and pinch points along the Trail which brings conservation benefits to the Wall and its setting.
- **Involving local people**  
Hadrian's Wall Country Volunteers were all informed of the Army visit prior to them arriving. They also helped marshal the diversions when the Regiment were walking the Trail. They have also since commented on their satisfaction with the tasks completed on their section of the National Trail Path.
- **Involving local businesses**

Many local businesses benefited from the Army's presence on the Trail, particularly during the task days the end of each day's walking. As an example, the Army Major had originally contacted a large commercial brewery to supply beverages to celebrate the end of the walk at Segedunum. HWHL encouraged the use of a local brewery business within Hadrian's Wall Country. Wylam Brewery supplied the real ale.

## **Conclusions**

Following a very successful two weeks, the Colonel has kindly offered the services of his Regiment to any other tasks we may have on the National Trail up until November 2008. HWHL were presented with an engraved Regimental shield as a thank you for our involvement in the project.

The success of the project has demonstrated HWHL's ability to manage a large scale project of this kind, including the management of large groups walking the Trail. HWHL would definitely entertain a repeat visit and would support other stakeholders in working with the Army on any future projects.