

# June

## Weather report

An unsettled, cool month characterized by heavy, blustery, sometimes-thunderly showers interspersed with sunny intervals.



*A view of the south western boundary*

The Meteorological Office pronounced this to be the wettest June across England and Wales since 1914 and the total rainfall of 123mm added to the previously heavy rainfall of May left the woodland floor saturated - there was even standing water on the picnic site. Maximum daily temperatures were generally between 19 and 21 C.

Although the trees appear to be thriving, ground flora has become noticeably reluctant to develop



*White clouds reflected in a puddle on the picnic site*

# Extracts from Rodney's Diary

**6<sup>th</sup> June**

*Quick stroll around both ends. Some standing puddles on main ride and floor looking well dampened. Mosquitoes beginning to be a problem and generally dark under broadleaves with ground vegetation withering away.*

**9<sup>th</sup> June**

*Mosquitoes becoming a real pest after long wet spell, with large standing puddles along main track. Hemlock trunk fitted as bridge across lower part of deep gully - a shortcut for the more agile.*

*Trunk was slightly banana shaped and flat-faced on the concave side, so ideal for the job.*



*Looking west across the new log bridge over the gully*

**10<sup>th</sup> June**

*More brash clearance with main clearing all but finished, just remainder of bits under trees on the edge to remove then western side of gully to clear. Several specimens of new tree growth found over clearing now exposed to daylight, mainly hornbeam but also oak and a healthy chestnut protected with vole/rabbit tubes made from cut down clear plastic bottles, which hopefully will be effective.*

**21<sup>st</sup> June**

*Most of remaining stumps on picnic site winched out and ground levelled. Soil around stumps remarkably dry considering recent very wet spell.*

### ***25<sup>th</sup> June***

*Quick walk round as in the area, to assess state of the ground after heavy rain. Reasonable for the tractor but puddles across field track and main ride in wood so will park truck on roadside tomorrow to avoid getting bogged down. More bracken bashing around north western end to prevent it from taking over.*

### ***26<sup>th</sup> June***

*Continued clearing felled site and burning brash. Two more stumps removed from picnic site. After a sunny day with a fair wind will try to drive all the way into the wood tomorrow for more brash clearance.*



### ***27<sup>th</sup> June***

*Cleared felled trees and accumulated dead branches from far side of gully. Mostly finished now apart from small amounts of old rotting fallen branches and dead spindly hemlock side shoots, some of which will be left for insects and fungi to lunch on.*

## **The New Wolf End Glade**

### **September 2006 - June 2007**

We excitedly opened the envelope containing the Landmanager Report from Becci Harvey of the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG). After a period of despondency our spirits had been lifted by her positive comments as she walked around Long Wood **at the beginning of September 2006** assessing its components, features and possibilities, but there had been so much information to absorb in a very short time that we needed to be reminded of all the practical suggestions she had made regarding the future management of our wood.

Page 2 featured an action plan, a table summarising the action required for a list of subjects.

*'Conifer plantation - consider felling the western hemlock and Douglas fir.'*

Further into the report Paragraph 5.6 'Plantation woodland' expanded on this suggestion giving us three options:

- 1. Clear fell in two sections.*
- 2. Clear fell the whole lot in one go.*
- 3. Leave any felled areas to temporarily act as a glade and naturally regenerate.*

This made it sound so straightforward and easy, all we had to do was pick an option and our 1.7 hectare problem was solved.

I looked at Rodney who although fit was definitely no spring chicken, and me physically incapable of picking up more than a large stick. Options 1 and 2 were obviously going to require the services of a company to fell and remove the timber which we knew without any further investigation would involve more expense than we were willing to incur.

What did we want to do? How were we going to achieve it? Careful consideration was required.

I understood that becoming emotionally attached to something could lead to its preservation beyond all reason and to the detriment of progress but mental images of the Wolf End laid bare flickered around and the realisation dawned that this was just not acceptable. What would it be like to walk up the entrance slope and no longer be greeted by the warm, spicy aroma of the Douglas firs, not to be able to hunt for new fungi fruiting in the needle litter, or listen to the constant twittering of tiny birds flitting between the high branches?

We needed more information.

The following week we spent a very enjoyable day at the Bentley Weald Woodfair. A poster displayed on a stand run by the Forestry Commission advertising a forthcoming demonstration entitled 'Ancient Woodland Restoration Event' attracted my attention and whilst I rummaged in my bag for a pencil to record the details, the man on duty wandered over to enquire whether I needed any help. After explaining our predicament regarding the politically incorrect conifers he offered yet another option as a solution.

'Well, how about leaving the Douglas fir and removing the western hemlock?'

Instinctively this seemed to make sense especially when combined with choice number 3 from the FWAG report, but being so inexperienced we needed every piece of advice on offer before making a final decision. I booked Rodney a place on the Event to be held at the Woodland Enterprise Centre and Hundred Acre Wood in mid October. It was hosted by Mike Chapman the young, energetic, enthusiastic, High Weald Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites Officer who after a conversation with Rodney during the day, made an appointment to visit Long Wood to assess our plantation compartment.

His appreciation of the large Douglas fir as handsome trees in their own right and his recommendation to apply for a felling licence to remove the hemlock in a series of small groups undoubtedly seemed to be the right plan of action for us personally.

With Mike's assistance, by December 2006 we were in receipt of a piece of paper from the Forestry Commission giving us official permission to thin 200 western hemlocks before December 2011.

As required, the trees to be felled had been decorated with large orange crosses, personal protective equipment had been

purchased including a bright orange, shiny, new helmet complete with visor and ear-muffs, the chainsaw had been serviced, ropes, bill-hook, bow-saw and hand-winch collected together. Everything was ready, but where to begin?

This was no mean task that Rodney was about to undertake, even the smaller, spindlier trees were over 30 metres in height. He finally decided to start with the hemlocks that grew to the east of the caravan to prevent them encroaching any further into the broadleaved section of the wood and two huge neglected chestnut stools were also to be coppiced on this patch of ground. Clad in his new warrior gear, visor down, the chainsaw started whining. It was to become a very familiar sound over the next few months - eeeeeeeeeeeeeee, creak, clatter, thud!



Timber!



Rodney worked carefully and methodically so that the trees dropped into spaces. The majority of them fell where they were supposed to, meaning he only occasionally needed to employ the 2-ton ratchet hand winch to persuade

an awkward trunk to descend in the required direction. He moved progressively westwards from the caravan to the far side

of the gully, his 14-inch McCulloch chainsaw, which had only originally been purchased for home use, coping remarkably well. Dare I suggest that he appeared to be thoroughly enjoying this Boy's Own lumber jacking adventure to the extent that the time needed to clear the increasingly enormous pile of trunks and branches was possibly being disregarded? Felling had to stop in March to allow the birds to carry out their normal spring activities of mating, nesting and rearing their young undisturbed.



Then the seemingly endless, exhausting tasks began: lopping off side branches, sorting usable wood from the rubbish, piling brash into the trailer to transport and burn on the picnic site, dragging trunks to storage spaces, cutting and stacking log lengths to dry. To quote Rodney's diary entry made on the 24<sup>th</sup> May, 2007:

'Will remember to fell a smaller area in future now I know how much work is involved as this year's worth was too much for one pair of hands.'

By the end of June the labouring had come to an end. We had a new glade.

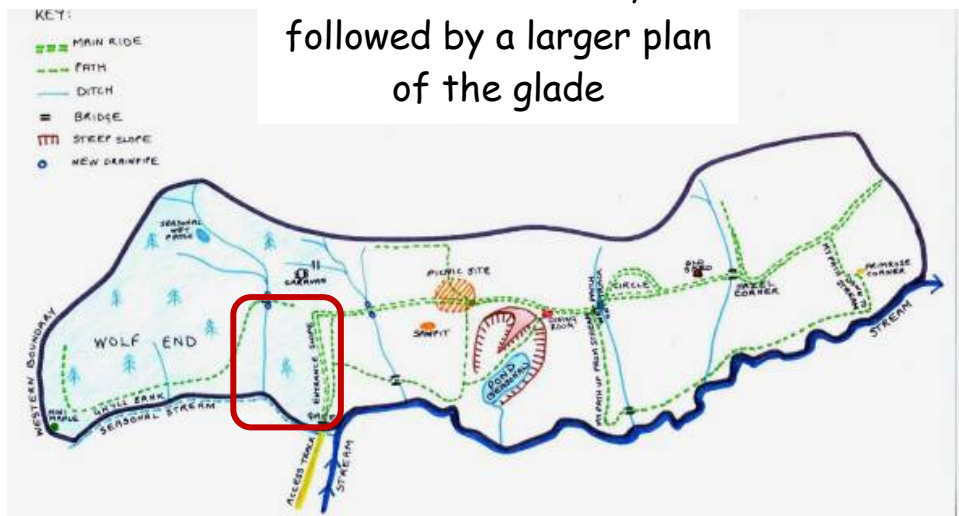




I have featured **the new wolf end glade** this month because its creation has been a commendable achievement and hopefully the first of many (though smaller!) such spaces across the Wolf End as this

compartment is progressively cleared of western hemlocks. Already new plant growth is pushing its way up through the soil but is still too tiny to be positively identified and on the 26<sup>th</sup> June I observed a White Admiral butterfly inspecting the site. Several naturally regenerated hornbeam, oak and chestnut saplings have also made an appearance to take their chances against the elements and wildlife and when we have spotted them first, clear plastic tubes have been put in place to increase their odds. It will be fascinating to watch and record how this glade develops over the next few years.

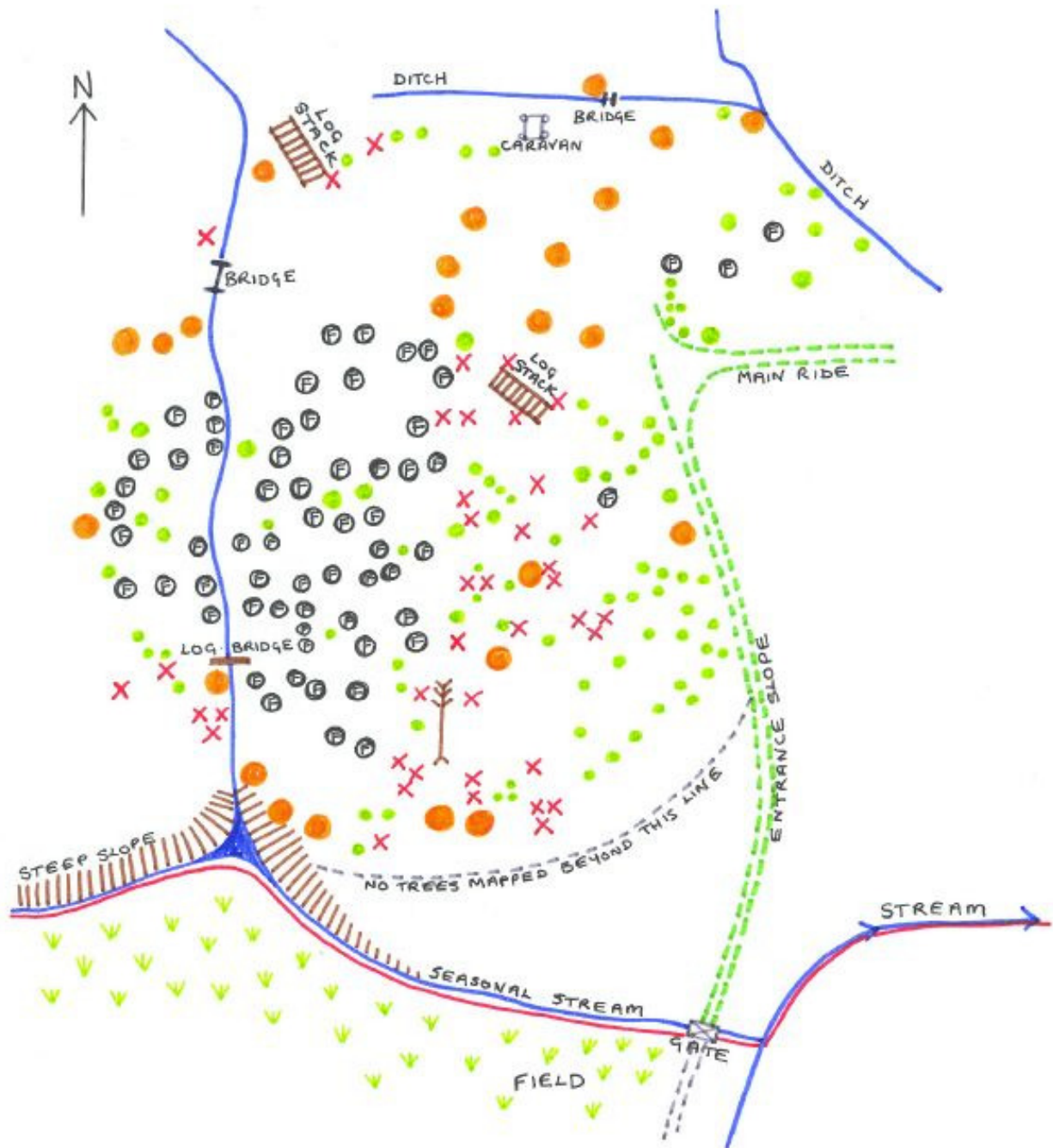
Showing location of  
Wolf End Glade,  
followed by a larger plan  
of the glade





# Plan of the new Wolf End Glade

showing where trees were felled - December 2006 to March 2007



**Key:**

- Felled tree
- ✗ Western hemlock marked for felling at a future date
- Mature Douglas fir
- Broadleaved tree – birch, chestnut, hazel, hornbeam, oak or rowan.

*Tsuga heterophylla*

## Western Hemlock

The Western Hemlock growing in Long Wood have been referred to and treated as if they were vermin, but this is solely due to the fact that they are evergreen conifers planted on an ancient site where native broadleaved trees should be naturally regenerating to maintain the temperate woodland. They were introduced into this country in 1851 from the Pacific seaboard of North America as forestry and ornamental trees. In



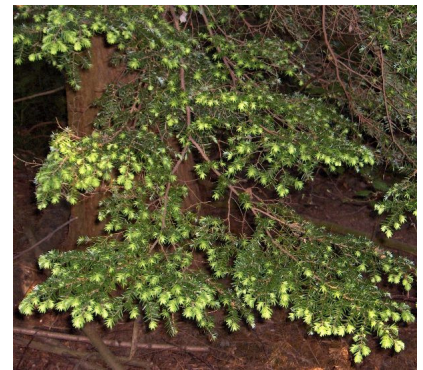
sheltered parks they have developed into beautiful conical shaped specimens with tall, straight trunks and characteristic drooping leading shoots and branch tips. However in forestry plantations the Western Hemlock's less amenable attributes become apparent. The hanging leading shoot is able to push its way up through other trees and the bright green, dense foliage of the downswept branches creates, and is capable of surviving in, a deep shade preventing the regeneration of dissimilar species whilst prolifically reproducing itself.

In our wood this resulted in the dark and sinister 'Wolf End' compartment where the Hemlock that had originally been planted approximately 50-60 years ago alongside the Douglas fir, had seeded and created an almost impenetrable understorey of saplings soaking up every available ray of light. It is tempting though to retain two or three of the more majestic trees, being vigilant to locate and remove any seedlings before they have chance to really take root.



In their native land Western Hemlock can live for several centuries and attain a height of 70 metres but in Great Britain they tend to achieve a maximum of 40 metres.

The bark, which is a purplish brown with scaly ridges when young, later develops narrow fissures. Round tipped leaves that have two bright white bands underneath occur in three different lengths. Small 2-3 centimetre long, egg-shaped cones grow, pointing downwards, from the shoot tips; the tree is known to drop one for every square inch of ground beneath its canopy. Hemlock leaves and twigs yield spruce oil for commercially flavouring ice cream, soft drinks and chewing gum. Closely related to spruces, the fine pale timber is mainly used in paper-making but it also provides a slow burning fuel, useful for banking up a fire and keeping it burning overnight.



*New season's growth*

Edible young leaves and shoots from the trees were regarded as an emergency food by Alaskan Indians and the inner bark is also edible either raw or cooked, but although preparations made from these natural ingredients were traditionally employed by several native North American tribes to treat a variety of complaints they are no longer utilised in modern herbal medicine. The name Hemlock derives from the sour aroma of the crushed foliage said to resemble that of the poisonous herb *Canium maculatum*.



## *Pseudotsuga menziesii*

### **Douglas Fir**

The Douglas fir is the only other introduced evergreen conifer that grows in our wood, although despite its name it is not actually a true fir at all but a *Pseudotsuga* or false Hemlock.

Thankfully these tall, handsome trees nearing maturity in the 'Wolf End' compartment received a reprieve and with the Western Hemlock being progressively felled, will have more light and space for their crowns to develop and spread.

Our only concern is whether wind-blow damage will become a problem because there is now very little protection from the prevailing south westerly gales around the perimeter of the new clearing. At one time there were obviously many more Douglas fir growing in Long Wood as evidenced by huge rotting stumps, which together with two large specimens leaning at 45 degrees caught up and supported amongst surrounding branches, are all pointing north-westwards and were therefore most likely to have been brought down during the great storm of 1987.

The tree originates in North America where it was documented by a ship's surgeon/botanist named Archibald Menzies in 1791 near Seattle, and then the famous plant hunter David Douglas brought the first seeds back to Britain. Here they prospered in moist soil, sheltered conditions and clean air. The tallest tree ever recorded was a Douglas fir in British Columbia that had attained a height of 127 metres when it was felled in 1895, but the majority of ours have reached more modest heights of 30 to 35 metres. One exception will possibly be a much younger self-seeded tree thriving in damp ground close to the seasonal stream by the entrance gate, already our loftiest specimen and christened 'Baby Douglas'.





Immature, smooth, grey bark thickens and browns as it ages to become reddish-brown with very deep fissures. The flat, flexible, narrowly round-tipped needles are dull green above with two white bands beneath and grow from the twig in all directions like the bristles on a bottlebrush. They exude a heavy, warm fragrance reminiscent of the aroma of mulled wine at Christmastime, which on a dry, warm day

envelops us as we climb to the top of the entrance slope.

Distinctive, pendulous cones are up to 8 centimetres long and have three-pronged bracts on the outside of each scale pointing towards the tip of the cone.



In a Native American myth these bracts are explained as the tails and hind legs of mice that have taken refuge inside the scales during forest fires. Small mammals residing in Long Wood just appreciate them as a food source, stripping off scales to reach the seeds, leaving bare central stems littering the woodland floor or on top of rotting stumps.

The wood of the Douglas fir is dense, durable and strong- qualities making it especially suitable for use in the construction industry today in applications required to withstand heavy loads such as wharves, bridge parts and commercial buildings. Earlier uses varied from handles to snowshoes. It has always been prized as fuel because the bark contains pitch and the wood burns with a lot of heat but almost no smoke.

Various Native American tribes used resin obtained from the trunk as a chewing gum and also valued a sugar-like substance exuded by the twigs and leaves; even the bears in this tree's native habitat regularly scrape off the bark to eat the sap layer beneath.

## *Rosa canina*

Countless individual shapes have overlapped and interlocked like pieces of a huge three-dimensional puzzle to produce a voluptuous, exuberant, dense, green canopy that has closed overhead, obscuring all view of the sky, blocking out the light.



It is so dark beneath,  
human eyes struggle to focus in the gloom.  
Raindrops sporadically filter their way through to splash onto already sodden ground, glazing the discarded, rotting fragments of last season's covering. A delicate pastel pink petal floats down to land in the mire; an unblemished, pale heart cast off by the wild rose flowering high above. Temporary beauty, seduction accomplished, now banished to the underworld. It would be so easy in the twilight to succumb to melancholy, when this is merely a sign of one phase in the cycle of perpetuation giving way to another. There is no need in the natural world for artificial preservation, sentimentality or regret.  
Life moves on.