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# Living Woods

Magazine

**Barn the Spoon's  
First Book**

**The Great  
British Bake Out!**

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Swill, Chainsaws**

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## LIVING WOODS

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### Editor's comment

Whether you're yearning for the day a woodland becomes yours, or your dream of woodland ownership has come true, this issue is for you. It's all about first steps in woodland management, tools and kit, identifying alien invaders, and taking time to look (begins p 8).

Welcome to our new columnist Julia Goodfellow-Smith as she embarks on the journey of her first woodland year (p 10).

Charismatic, inspiring Barn the Spoon has written his first ever book, *Spon*, a beautiful volume of personal history, art and craft (p 24).

Summer is upon us. Enjoy the long, light days. And let us know what you think..



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## NcFed Weekend Veterans Aid Gathering and AGM

Intrigued by ancient trees? The Arboricultural Association is offering a one-day course, 'Valuing and Managing Veteran Trees', on 11 July 2017 at Ilminster, Somerset. The course is geared for anyone 'with an interest in trees', so no prerequisite training is necessary. Though, as it's taking place during Wimbledon fortnight, wellies will probably be required. Go to [www.trees.org.uk](http://www.trees.org.uk) and look under Training & Events.

Word comes from our friends at the NcFed. Mark your diaries! 21 – 22 October brings the National Coppice Federation's annual Weekend Gathering and AGM, at Ruskin Mill College in beautiful, wooded Horsley Valley in Nailsworth, south of Stroud in Gloucestershire and hosted by the Avon and South Cotswolds Coppice Group (ASCCG). Each year's meeting is hosted by an affiliate member group, and previous events have been held in Dorset, the Lake District and Lincolnshire. It's a time for coppice workers, green woodworkers, woodland managers and others to converge from all corners of the UK to talk, learn, share skills, discuss issues facing the industry and take part in a wide range of activities.

The 2017 theme is based on edge tools in the woods, including scythes in the woods, repair and sharpening of billhooks, big tree felling with axes and crosscut saws, axe hewing and coppicing with axes. There will be numerous demonstrations and plenty of 'have-a-go' sessions. Weekend attendees are invited to make optional visits to local woods owned by coppice group members.' Tools will be on sale courtesy of Tools For Self Reliance. Following a short AGM on Saturday night, Bob Burgess, who is bringing a large billhook display, will give a talk entitled 'A Load of Old Bill Hooks.' Further information and booking details will be available in early summer at [www.ncfed.org.uk](http://www.ncfed.org.uk). To add your name to the event mailing list, email the ASCCG at [info@asccg.co.uk](mailto:info@asccg.co.uk). Cost: £35 (NcFed members), £50 (nonmembers) covers camping on site and the weekend's great food. There will also be a pay bar.



Ian Dyball/Adobe Stock

## New App 1: Je Suis un Arbre

Researchers from four French research organisations have developed a plant ID app, PlantNet, that claims to be able to identify more than 4,000 plants (mainly in French territory, but we do overlap quite a bit). It collects data from a large social network which uploads pictures and information about plants. So the more users who join the volunteer effort, the better the app will become. For Android and iPhone at [identify.plantnet-project.org](http://identify.plantnet-project.org).

## New App 2: Gruffalo Invades UK Woodlands

The effort to lure youngsters into the woods continues with a free app from the Forestry Commission England. It lets users spot characters from the massively popular Gruffalo children's books in 26 woodlands around the country. Clues lead to footprint markers, then augmented reality technology takes over when a camera phone is pointed in their direction. The characters seem to appear right there in the woodland. A Spotters Activity Kit is also available for £3. [www.forestry.gov.uk/gruffalo](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/gruffalo)

## Outstanding in Their Field

Farming Today's Charlotte Smith will chair a day-long conference on agroforestry this month, sponsored by the Woodland Trust, the Soil Association and the Royal Forestry Society. Agroforestry, nicknamed 'Farming in 3D', means, simply, growing trees in fields, allowing farmers to grow two or more crops from the same land. A major review of the Land Use Policy Group found that agroforestry had the greatest potential of any system for 'sustainable intensification' of farming and increased income for farmers. The 22 June conference features scientists, policymakers and six agro-farmers speaking from experience. [www.soilassociation.org/farmers-growers/agroforestry-conference/](http://www.soilassociation.org/farmers-growers/agroforestry-conference/)



Phil Formby

Agroforestry farmer David Brass

## World Plant Report

Kew Science has published its second *State of the World's Plants* report, providing an up-to-date horizon scan taking stock of the world's most valuable and vulnerable plants. *State of the World's Plants* is an interactive and quite detailed overview of our planet's flora, their spread, their disappearance, their health, their threats and much more. As we go to press, the second annual international *State of the World's Plants* Symposium is on, gathering scientists and policymakers at the Royal Botanic Gardens to share research and trends. [www.kew.org](http://www.kew.org)

## Oh Deer

Now here's a thing. Dr Markus Eichhorn of the University of Nottingham's School of Life Sciences recently urged drastic action to control Britain's overpopulation of deer in order to restore the habitats of woodland birds. His study, co-authored with other British researchers and published in the *Journal of Applied Ecology*, found that where deer were overabundant, not only were bird populations in decline, but woodlands had 2/3 less foliage up to 2m where deer had fed. The same study also discovered the curious fact that in those same areas, trees were on average 5m taller than in locales where deer populations were in balance, leaving researchers puzzled.



David Hughes/Adobe Stock

## Fire Escape

Following the driest winter in 20 years, water companies have begun to warn us of possible drought this summer and therefore to prepare us for hosepipe bans. The Forestry Commission offers publications on building wildfire resistance into your forest management plan and risk management control measures. Find them here: [forestry.gov.uk/fr/INFD-7WKJDJ](http://forestry.gov.uk/fr/INFD-7WKJDJ)

## Make Your Scottish Voice Heard

The Scottish government has been busy, bringing the new Scottish Land Commission into existence on 1 April of this year. The brief is to provide direction, leadership and strategic thought to land reform in Scotland. North of the border, the government has a vision of land ownership and its management and use that is of benefit to everyone. In the first year, the six-member commission is introducing itself and listening to, well, you, in a series of Meet & Greets. The next one is 22 June at Leith Community Centre, Leith, Edinburgh, followed by Biggar in the Borders (venue tba) on 27 July, then 21 September at Clydebank Town Hall, Clydebank, Glasgow. For info: [landcommission.gov.scot](http://landcommission.gov.scot)



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## BROOKHOUSE WOOD

# See, Make, Connect

**B**ecoming the owner of a woodland – or, indeed, the manager of a woodland – offers a matchless opportunity not only to love trees, but to learn to appreciate trees in a focused and productive way. So many people live in wooden structures and use wooden objects every day, but are completely disconnected from trees. Just as it is easy to forget the animal that provided the cellophane-wrapped piece of meat in the supermarket, it is all too easy to lose the connection between trees and all the things around us that are made of wood.

By bringing people into our woodland at Brookhouse Wood in a beautiful part of the country (near Bromyard in Herefordshire) and showing them how it can function as a sanctuary from the rat race – yet still be a productive business – we try to validate a life in the woods as a viable option. I think trees appeal to everyone. But how to take the joy they bring and put it to good use in the context of making a woodland your home or source of income? That is the real challenge.

I have been fascinated by trees my entire life. Yet it wasn't until I began to make things directly from trees that I really started to know them and understand them. Certainly, I had spent years making things from wood purchased at builders' merchants, but only when I started making things directly from fresh bits of tree did I appreciate how they had grown. Increasing my knowledge and use of hand tools galvanised that relationship. When working with hand tools, I saw how the way in which a tree has grown had a clear and direct impact on how the tool cut through the fibres. By cleaving the wood instead of milling it, I learned that the shape follows the grain pattern. It became important to find a tree that had grown in a way that suited my purpose. Now, whether you seek a nice straight-grained, fast-grown ash tree to make a chair, or the crooked branch of a fruit tree to carve a spoon or ladle, that process of looking for what trees have to offer brings us closer to them and garners a respect for the energy that has gone into growing them.

Looking at trees in this way stretches time and lays the years out in front of you. Cleaving 20 years of growth from a log and selecting which part of its life will become a chair leg or a bowl for your food, and planning ahead to account for how the wood will shrink and change its shape as it takes on its new life. Spying a particularly fine sapling, straight as an arrow, and clearing a space around it to let it grow, knowing that in 10 or 15 years' time it will provide the material for a group of first-time chair makers, some of whom might still be children now. Having this relationship with things that are far older than I will ever be and looking after plants that will be here long after I am gone, slows time down for me and brings peace to my workplace.

“Looking at trees in this way stretches time”



Will St Clair

The best way I know to connect people with trees is to teach green woodwork with hand tools. Doing this in the woods where the trees have come from brings people as close to the source of the material as possible.

If you are fortunate enough to own or manage a woodland, there are many different ways to bring people closer to the trees. Even if you are not ready to start building treehouses, coppicing or managing your woodland for timber, try to bring people into your woodland and share what the trees have to offer with them. In this small way, we can feel more like shepherds than consumers.

Courses and products: [willstclair.co.uk](http://willstclair.co.uk)

Woodland accommodation: [www.brookhousewoods.com](http://www.brookhousewoods.com)

# Your New Woodland: The Adventure Begins

Woodland owners' advice on management, tools and getting to know your wood

# View Through the Trees

**Julia Goodfellow-Smith** and her husband Matthew just purchased their dream woodland, Garland Wood. In the first of a series, *Living Woods'* new columnist begins a year-long journey in woodland ownership.



Ian Layzell



Ian Layzell

It was a glorious spring day when I laid back for the first time and gazed at the sky through the branches. Great tits were flitting around nearby and a buzzard was circling overhead. I was calm and relaxed, and then suddenly, full of butterflies. This is our wood. We get to look after it. We can come here whenever we like, and just be. Or make things, or work.

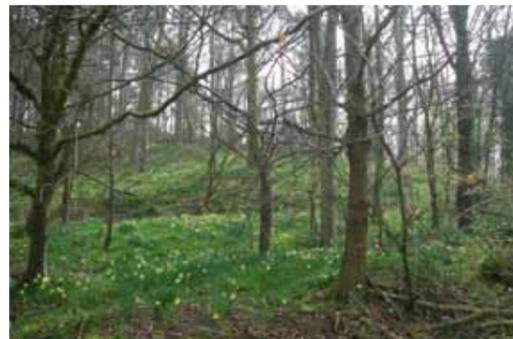
We had been searching for a woodland for years. When a likely contender went onto the market, we would drop everything to take a look at it. A couple of disappointments quickly taught us that we needed to check with the agent before setting off, because they sell so quickly. Most of the woodlands we saw were not right for us. They looked fine on paper, but just didn't make our hearts sing when we saw them.

We almost bought a magical woodland in north Wales, but scared the vendor off when we asked about fencing responsibilities. We became quite despondent and called the search off, arguing that the time was not right. Or, so I thought! My husband stayed on the mailing list of [woodlands.co.uk](http://woodlands.co.uk), and one day in February, saw a woodland for sale that was just 15 miles from home. We visited, fell in love with it, and the rest, as they say, is history.

The purchase process was straightforward and six weeks later, here I was, lying in our own woodland, admiring the view.

People say that you should spend a year getting to know your woodland before making any big decisions, but I anticipated that we would be keen to get going. After all, we both started our careers in countryside management and have a reasonable working knowledge of woodland management.

I have been surprised to find that, although we are full of ideas about things we'd like to do – a bit of meadow here, a coppice there, thinning the beech trees – I am reluctant to do anything quickly. It seems right to get to know the woodland first and not to make any hasty decisions.



We have known the woodland for less than three months – less than a season – but it has changed so much already. When we first saw it, the silver-barked beech trees rose from a woodland floor russet with fallen leaves. Then came the golden glow of wild daffodils and now, a haze of beautiful bluebells. When the wind catches one of the wild cherries, blossom confetti drifts through the woodland. What delights are in store for us when the sun shines through a lime-green canopy and the butterflies visit our verges, when the leaves turn, or on a snowy winter's morning?

We will continue to develop our ideas as the seasons progress, but we won't be doing anything significant until we know the woodland much better.

This is what has surprised me most so far – how relaxed I have been. Nothing has to be done in a hurry. In fact, it's better if it isn't. I wander around enjoying myself rather than doing the detailed survey I set out to do. I find myself sitting down, or even lying down, looking through the trees, instead of working. We wander along the track to see who else is in the woodland and pass the time of day with them. And suddenly, we find that hours have passed and it's time to go home.

In our day-to-day life, things have to be done quickly, but in a woodland, almost everything can wait for another day, or even another year, without causing a problem. It puts life into a different perspective.

The sociable aspect of owning a wood has been another surprise for me. We bought one part of a woodland that was split into lots by [woodlands.co.uk](http://woodlands.co.uk), which means that we have woodland neighbours. One of our neighbours has set up a Facebook group, so we are in contact with each other even if we visit the woods

on different days. At Easter, a few of us got together for an Easter egg hunt and barbecue, which was a great social event. All of our neighbours are friendly and happy to share ideas – it's a real bonus that we weren't expecting.

We are slowly beginning to build up a picture of the wildlife that shares our wood. We know from the government's Magic Map that part of our woodland is designated as 'ancient replanted woodland' and a Priority Habitat Inventory Deciduous Woodland, and need to investigate further to really understand what that means. Our neighbours have posted photos of deer, badgers and dormice on Facebook. Wildlife pathways are becoming clearer now that we have greenery on the woodland floor. We have seen evidence of deer munching one of our



young trees. I have learnt that bumble bees displace leaves as they fly over them. Have I really never slowed down enough to notice that before? We have dusted off our bird, tree and plant identification books, and found that we need one for insects too. We will do a wildlife survey over the coming months, but judging by our progress so far, it will be done slowly, as the mood takes us.

One thing we have started working on is an area in the woodland where we can shelter from the rain, take a toilet break, relax with a cup of tea and sometimes sleep over. After a few visits, we decided where to dig a pit latrine and started to build a dead-hedge as a screen. We have also decided where we are going to erect our bodgers' shelter. As you might imagine, we are progressing at a leisurely pace.

Being a small woodland owner has been a tremendous experience already, and it's only been a few weeks. This weekend, my husband looked up from creating the dead-hedge, smiled at me and said, 'Do you know what? We're actually living our dream!' And we really are.

[www.magic.gov.uk](http://www.magic.gov.uk)  
Julia and Matthew Goodfellow-Smith's sustainability consultancy: [questforfuturesolutions.co.uk](http://questforfuturesolutions.co.uk)

# The Owners Speak

**E**xperienced woodland owners advise to new woodland owners. Yvonne and Simon Sonsino (YSS), Sarah and John Durrant (SJD), Judith Millidge (JM) and Tracy Pepler (TP) have lively opinions.

*What advice would you give someone who has just purchased a woodland?*

**SJD:** My main advice would actually be to do nothing for the first year. You've bought it and now you are either eager to get in there and start doing something 'to it', or you are completely overwhelmed about what you've taken on. So don't be. This piece of land has been here a long time without you. It's just as everyone says: we are merely custodians for a relatively short time in its history.

For us it was about conservation. I have some knowledge of ecology. If you're interested and you don't know much I would advise you take a course using the money woodlands.co.uk provide for this. In the meantime, just make observations over the seasons, get to 'learn' it as you would a new garden.

**YSS:** Congratulations – what a wonderful achievement. Don't try and do it all at once, however, and get some help with jobs that you are not used to doing every day. We had help with some of the big jobs (like stone track building, large felling jobs, advice on biological controls), but we are quite happy doing the maintenance and smaller jobs. We are learning all the time.

**JM:** Don't feel that you need to rush into anything. You will hear a great deal about bringing woods back into management to improve sustainability or to aid conservation. These are undoubtedly important, but it really is better to wait and watch for a year to see what crops up. Take photos to record seasonal changes and by all means make a plan. Talk to your neighbours and ask what worked for them. And what didn't. Above all, take time to enjoy it and appreciate your good fortune.

When you do embark on management, remember to take it gradually and bear in mind that some of your actions may have unforeseen consequences. Taking out lots of ivy, for example, will give the trees space to breathe, but will also open up areas to nettles and other weeds.

**TP:** Definitely do not DO anything. This advice is widely given. It is not urgent (other than to make it safe) to get clearing trees/plants etc. Best to find out more first, because it is not easy to put things

back if you cut or clear stuff and later regret it.

Get to understand more about the diversity in the wood, why it is there and its effect on the land and the creatures. Some people are tempted to tidy up and this might be detrimental. There are many groups of people out there who can give advice. Also, get lots of opinions and then weigh them up and think what works best for you.

Get to know woodland neighbours, both those who own woods and those who live nearby. Be friendly!

*What's the best thing you've done -- or not done -- in your woodland?*

**YSS:** I think it must be the good stone track we had built that takes you right into the centre of the woodland together with a level parking space big

enough for about 10 cars. Our wood is on a slope so it's great to have somewhere level for working, a little shed, a few visitors to park and enjoy the woodland. Also we had a small clearing (half acre) after diseased Japanese Larch removal. My children and grandchildren helped spread grass and wildflower seeds over it, so we now have a small meadow. I love this space - lots of light and sun to enjoy in the centre of our woodland.

**SJD:** Hire someone to keep the rides cut. It helps wildlife, and in our case, aids the ability to get around the site.

**JM:** Clearing a spot for a fire pit and erecting a small shed to store a few old tools. We have had lots of



*Judith Millidge in her wood*

fun with friends and family who were happy to be roped into helping out in return for campfire food and beer. And in the case of one particularly dedicated friend, plenty of firewood (you know who you are, Mr Stockton).

*What's the one thing you wish you hadn't done?*

**YSS:** We don't really have any regrets yet, except perhaps we should have bought it sooner. It is also quite a long way from where we live, so we can't be there every day or week. Luckily, unlike a garden, it doesn't need to be tended every day or week however, so this has not really been a big deal. It feels like a perfect place to escape to, and, being a distance from home, it really is an escape!

*Judith Millidge says, 'Cheap hammocks were very popular with the boys*

**SJD:** Driving on one area of the ride which was clearly too wet. The car sank, and we had to get a very helpful local farmer with his tractor to haul us out. We have since put in hard core over the tracks and avoid the areas that are too wet, like normal sensible

## MANAGEMENT

people would have done in the first place.

**JM:** We have been very slow to practice what I preach.

*What item that you purchased has been the most useful?*

**SJD:** My husband would say the chainsaw. I would say the Silky handsaw; they are so sharp and lightweight, anyone can use them. Great for removing side branches.

**JM:** Chainsaw and Timberjack log-lifter (or would be if we could find it!).

Cheap hammocks were extremely popular when the children were younger.

**TP:** The log trolley is fabulous, and the Truncator.

*What item that you purchased was a waste of money?*

**SJD:** I decided I absolutely had to have a billhook. Everyone seemed to have one, and I know lots of people love them and cherish them. Five years on, never used it.

**JM:** A cheap axe, which fell apart on first usage. You get what you pay for.

*What book(s) aided you most?*

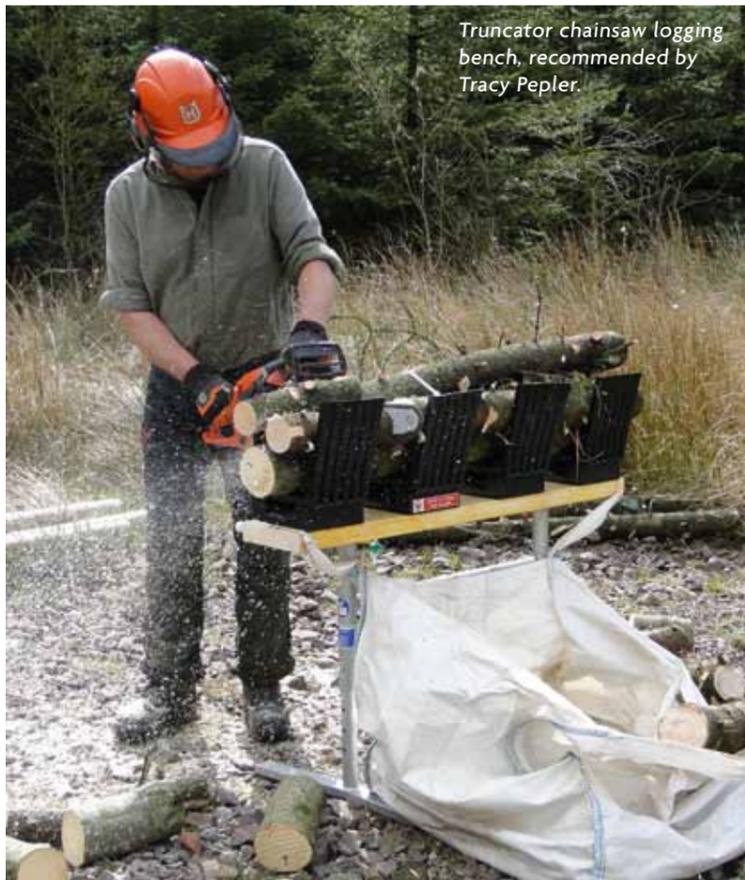
**SJD:** Anything written by Oliver Rackham. The Collins New Naturalists series are wonderful for covering everything from butterflies to owls, but may be a bit too detailed for some. Woodlands.co.uk gave us a copy of *Badgers, Beeches and Blisters* by Julian Evans (Editor's note: This book is now updated and rewritten and has been released as *Getting Started in Your Own Wood*) I think that's a good entry level to start thinking about what you want to get out of it, even if you think you already know.

**JM:** *Getting Started in Your Own Wood* by Julian Evans and Will Rolls – full of really sensible advice for the beginner, *Norwegian Wood* by Lars Mytting, and *Shelters Shacks and Shanties* by Daniel Carter Beard, for a robust early 20th century view on constructing your own cabin and channelling your inner pioneer.

**TP:** I really liked Ben Law *The Woodland Way*. *The Stick Book: Loads of things you can make or do with a stick* by Fiona Danks and Jo Schofield (I take my class to the wood!). Nature detectives website: [www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/naturedetectives/](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/naturedetectives/)

*If you were doing it again, what would you do differently?*

**JM:** I wouldn't buy a needy listed house a couple of years after the wood purchase. We effectively abandoned the woodland, returning only to get firewood to heat our drafty new home.



Truncator chainsaw logging bench, recommended by Tracy Pepler.



Tracy Pepler finds the Stein Arbor Trolley 'fabulous'

**Professor Julian Evans, OBE FICFor**, literally wrote the book for new woodland owners – more than once. He updated and rewrote his popular 2006 *Badger, Beeches and Blisters: Getting Started in Your Own Wood* as *Getting Started in Your Own Wood*. And as a woodland owner of more than 30 years, he offered this guidance:

'Do nothing for a year?' Good advice. I totally agree with that.

Another piece of advice related to that: keep a woodland diary. After every visit, make a note of what you see, what your reactions have been, even just a couple of sentences. I've got all of mine going back to 1986.

## WOODLAND MANAGEMENT

# You Just Bought a Wood! Now what?

What do you do now? **Toby Allen** knows what to ask

**W**henever a new owner asks me for advice about what to do after buying a woodland, I have the same answer as most other professionals: **DO NOTHING FOR A YEAR**. This is not what you want to hear when you're full of enthusiasm about getting stuck in. But your first year is irreplaceable. This is the time to plan, to learn, to observe, to get to know your land, to decide on your goals.

### Go Exploring

Split the wood into compartments (or 'coups') on a map and mark down what you see. Note your observations as the seasons change (this is why it needs to be at least a year). Have several maps: for trees, for flora, for archaeology, for access routes and so on. Put it all together on one big map when you've finished. This is a good time to take an inventory of what you have bought, to assess each coup. What species of trees are there? How are they doing? Are they all the same age or a mixture of ages and sizes? Are they spaced out or tightly grouped? (Look at the canopy as well as the stems.) What's the regeneration like? Are there signs of pests or disease?

Assess the volume of timber in each stand. Taking a snapshot estimate once every few years tells you how well the trees are growing. The Forestry Commission website provides guidance on measuring trees, and you can do it simply by taking a couple of sample plots and multiplying by the compartment size, or you can measure every tree. If you are applying for felling permission you will need this information to calculate the volume you plan to remove.

### Knowledge is King

Learn as much as you can from all reliable sources. Network with other owners and make an effort to meet your neighbours. You can't beat swapping experiences with fellow owners. The Small Woods Association (SWA) events in members' woods let you meet with like-minded people. Consider the Royal Forestry Society, CONFOR, Woodland Heritage, the Small Woodland Owners' Group (SWOG) and the Coppice Federation. If your woodland is within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), such as the Weald of Kent, or the Chilterns, it is worth contacting them for information and advice about how your wood has evolved over time and what can be done to preserve it.

The *Forestry Journal* is the main trade read, but small woodland owners are likely to find great value in the magazines and newsletters of SWOG and SWA – as well as the wonderful *Living Woods* of course! Social media groups, like ARBTALK and SWOG, are extremely useful. The Forestry Commission's website has guidance on pretty much everything forestry-related, plenty of it pitched to the small woodland owner, and there are books covering most aspects of woodland management, from the technical to the emotional.

Identify the holes in your knowledge and fill them. Use this time to take a course or two. If you want to carry out work yourself, you should have chainsaw training, and it might be worth volunteering to work with someone to gain experience. When it comes to safety, trial and error isn't the best option, and seeing how others work a site will give you ideas about how to do things back in your own wood. The Forest



Chris Lewis

Industry Safety Accord (FISA) website has safety guides covering forestry activities, so there's no excuse for unsafe practice. Agricultural and local colleges provide woodland management and chainsaw training, as do many independent teachers and small contracting firms. Look for recommendations via social media or owners' websites. Do you plan to add value to your timber by making products to sell or through non-timber activities like forest schools, mushroom growing, hunting? What are the pros and cons and what is the market?

### Make a Management Plan.

How you look after your wood is entirely up to you. Subject to gaining the correct permissions, you have the freedom to do whatever you want. Be mindful that the wood will be there long after you've gone, and your decisions will have an effect on the future. As a forester and an advocate for Britain's woodlands, my opinion is that woodlands should be managed and that growing trees should be at the heart of any management plan. Nearly half of the UK's 13% woodland cover is not in active management, which means more than 6% of our country's limited land is not used to capture carbon, provide rural jobs, contribute to the economy, have resilience against disease and climate change, and shelter diverse wildlife.

But it really is up to you. What do you want from your wood? Enjoyment? Income? How do you want the wood to look in 5, 10, 20 and 50 years? What improvements would you make to the woodland's structure and infrastructure to achieve your aims? Your objectives may include managing rides and glades for butterflies and flowers, improving access or growing high quality timber. Get advice and other views on your plan and ambitions. If you apply for felling permission from the Forestry Commission, they will probably insist on a visit, a perfect opportunity to mine the agent for information. Remember that you can always change your mind about how to manage your wood, but it is important to work toward a set of objectives.

If you choose to actively manage your woodland, start with the end goal and work backwards to where you are now. You will need all the information you gleaned



Chris Lewis

previously to get this right. You have taken a snapshot of the volume and quality of timber in the wood, you have noted down the wildlife considerations, where the previous access points are, you have watched the woodland change through the seasons, where the wet and dry places are, you've found out what has worked or failed locally, you have seen other woodlands at work and met with others doing similar work. There are grants available to help you create a management plan for your woods (see the Forestry Commission website). The Sylva Foundation's myForest website has excellent free resources to help assess, record and draw up a management plan for your woodland. If you decide to harvest trees, you need a good idea of the volume you wish to remove. Can you handle this or is it a job for a professional? (See the sidebar.) Be honest about your capabilities, especially if you are managing the wood on a part time basis.

Once you have a management plan, it's time to think about the practicalities of bringing this to life. Operational planning will save time and money in the long run. It's better to find the glitches in your plan before you begin!

You may discover that there are costs involved in woodland ownership. You will have identified any need for pest control measures in your survey. Do you need to pay for squirrel control or will someone be paying you to stalk deer? Do you have the liability of roadside trees? If you are bringing in outside parties for activities in your wood, do you need to pay to have any potentially dangerous trees made safe? Insurance? Will you have to buy any tools or hire in labour? Are the rides and access points in need of repair (they probably will be if you choose to harvest timber)? Armed with the cost implications of different projects, you can start to make informed decisions about your woodland management.

I am hoping you now realise why taking a year out before commencing work is a good idea. In fact, the longer you are able to observe, to learn, to plan and to enjoy your exciting new venture, the better it will be in the long term. With knowledge you can make the dream a reality.



Chris Lewis

### Harvesting Timber and Hiring Professionals

If your woodland is of sufficient size – or if you are able to join forces with neighbouring woodland owners – you may decide to harvest timber from your land. And that brings a host of new considerations.

Applying for felling permission from the Forestry Commission is only the beginning. Because of your previous work taking an inventory, you should now have a good idea of the species, quality and volume growing within the woodland and can make an educated guess about the value of the standing trees. A quick call to a local firewood merchant, sawmill or similar will tell you the prices they will pay. Then calculate backwards and take into consideration harvesting costs, haulage, and any costs to improve access.

The timber will need to be stacked where it can be collected for transport, such as a loading bay accessible by lorry. Is there a clear set of extraction routes (tracks and rides) through the wood to limit compaction and damage to the soil and other trees? What machinery, if any, is needed to harvest the trees? Even if your wood is small, it is still important to have a plan.

You might want to employ the services of a horse logger. Horse loggers are best used by owners wishing to extract trees a short distance over inaccessible terrain, and can work well as a link in the chain with other forms of extraction.

There is a lot of professional help available for woodland owners who require it. Be sure to ask for recommendations from owners' groups or fellow owners before you hire in services.

Forestry agents and management companies manage all aspects of woodlands generally. They will know how to access appropriate grants and have contacts with timber buyers and contractors. They can be involved as little as coming for a visit to give you advice or taking over the full management of your forest, arranging the work and marketing your timber. Just be aware that forestry is full of 'middlemen' and they all make a living from taking a cut of the timber pie.

Contractors will carry out the practical work in your woods, and will often be able to give you advice about the work

**Toby Allen** and his wife **Aly May** are the founder/owners of Say It With Wood, sustainably offering chestnut fencing, garden furniture and structures, forestry services and firewood supply, among many other services. [www.sayitwithwood.co.uk](http://www.sayitwithwood.co.uk)



AdobeStock

involved. Most carry out work in a professional manner, though poor communication or a mismatch of contractor to job can be a source of frustration. For example, if you sell your trees to the highest bidder they will want to bring the timber out for the lowest cost possible. Clearly discuss how you want the site left before work begins so the job can be priced accordingly.

Craftspeople or smallscale operators may carry out work in exchange for timber for their businesses. Having someone on site making products has many benefits. They can provide security and manage the wood in a sympathetic way, though they are unlikely to have the equipment or experience to handle large volume extraction or be economic in a commercial harvest.

Most contractors will work cooperatively with others so the customer can get the right people with the right kit for the job. A machine of the appropriate size for the task can be in and out swiftly, leaving your wood to recover sooner than something too small for the job. A pre-work contract makes your goals clear to people working in your wood so they can tailor the job to suit what you are hoping to achieve.

Be aware that under the guidelines set out by the Forest Industry Safety Accord you have a duty as a landowner towards anyone carrying out works in your wood. Their website will give you details of this and other safety information.

### Useful websites:

Forestry Commission: [www.forestry.gov.uk](http://www.forestry.gov.uk)  
 Sylva Foundation: [www.sylva.org.uk/myforest](http://www.sylva.org.uk/myforest)  
 SWOG: [www.swog.org.uk](http://www.swog.org.uk)  
 Woodlands.co.uk  
 Small Woods Association: [www.smallwoods.org.uk](http://www.smallwoods.org.uk)  
 RFS [www.rfs.org.uk](http://www.rfs.org.uk)  
 Arb Association [www.trees.org.uk](http://www.trees.org.uk) (to search for contactors)  
 National Association of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: [www.landscapesforlife.org.uk](http://www.landscapesforlife.org.uk)  
 FISA [www.ukfisa.com](http://www.ukfisa.com)

## TOOLS

# All the Kit You Need

Essential tools and accessories + an animal

Own a woodland provides an ironclad excuse to buy new stuff. We consulted with woodland manager Jon Snape and his friend and colleague, Bryn Reynolds, and discovered that there is some agreement about the basic kit you need.

'The TCV Guides [The Conservation Volunteers] are the bee's knees,' said Jon. 'After that, if you're going to become qualified to use a chainsaw, a PPE Starter Pack. The ideal pack would include a helmet – with a visor – and earmuffs, gloves, good steel toe capped wellies, waterproofs. And a first aid kit, specified for chainsaw use, a good quality one with plenty of plasters.'

On the subject of tools, Jon reckoned, 'A Silky Fox saw, a folding one is okay. Not a bow saw – those are really novice tools for beginners that would generally be fine for small diameter branches. A billhook would be useful. Antique ones are better than some newer ones. And I'd say a strimmer, preferably Stihl, with a strimmer cord and brush-cutter blade to keep internal tracks clear.'

'You don't need qualifications for that,' piped up Bryn. 'To use a strimmer.'

John went on, 'And if you've got a strimmer, you're going to want a proper fuel can with a non-spill nozzle, Stihl or Husqvarna.'

'I think an axe is good,' said Bryn. 'A small one. A hatchet.'

'A hatchet? A hatchet? That's so American,' said Jon. 'You mean an axe. So you'll need sharpening tools, a flat file. Not a whetstone.'

'It's difficult to get the technique right with a whetstone. You can get a good sharp edge with a file,' said Bryn.

'For the axe, Gransfors Bruk are the best you can get,' said Jon. 'My advice is to pay for quality all the way. And a knife.'

Bryn said, 'For making pointy sticks.'

Jon gave him a look. 'For non-specific tasks, a knife is incredibly useful.'

'You could use it to cut your strimmer cord,' said Bryn.

'You want to enjoy spending time in your woods, so the first thing is –' Jon started.

' – a Kelly Kettle,' interrupted Bryn.

'Yes, a Kelly Kettle,' agreed Jon.

'And chairs! Foldable, comfortable chairs!' said Bryn.

'He's such a glamer,' Jon rolled his eyes. 'You need stuff for making a fire. A windproof lighter.' He indicated Bryn. 'He wants a tent. I'm happy sleeping in my car.'

'Tipi Tents are very hot right now,' said Bryn. He warmed to the subject. 'With raised beds off the ground...'

Jon returned the conversation to basic kit. 'To keep



Alex Ramsay / Alamy Stock Photo

**Points of agreement:** Kelly Kettle and dog

your site safe, tool sheds are what people start thinking about, but keeping expensive bits of kit in one? No. And get proper training for the tools you use. A little knowledge is dangerous. Another good ID book is the *Collins Tree Guide*. A head torch might be useful. Some people get a tripod and kettle and Dutch oven, but it is a different way of cooking, so maybe not 'basic kit,' mused Jon.

'Cool boxes!' said Bryn.

'We don't even have a cool box,' said Jon.

'I know we don't, but...' said Bryn. 'How about a chopping board? A spatula?'

'You can make those with your hatchet,' said Jon.

A moment's thought.

'A dog is a must-have,' said Bryn.

'When you're camping in your woodland, you will feel so much safer if you have a dog,' said Jon. 'What would I say to new woodland owners? Be an optimist and don't let things get you down. And have a good sense of humour.'

See p 47 for stockist info.



### FEATURING

- Tree health
- Woodland management
- Tools–tests and reviews
- Woodcraft
- Green woodworking
- Wood as fuel
- Community woodlands
- Bushcraft & wild food
- Interviews
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**THE MAGAZINE FOR LOVERS OF TREES AND WOODS**

# The Right Chainsaw for the Job

## Crispin Rogers on size, power and weight

**S**o you have bought a wood and now need a chainsaw? Assuming that you have never used a chainsaw or have little experience of chainsaws, let's start.

You may want to try a chainsaw and so go to a hire shop to rent one. You will find that most hire shops don't have them or want to see your certificate\*. Why? Suffice it to say that chainsaws are dangerous pieces of equipment and hire shops have no business renting them to the inexperienced.

Using a chainsaw safely requires knowledge of their dangers and how to avoid them. So take a good course, follow the rules and, with experience, you will get better at it. You must be vigilant when using a chainsaw, quick to react to possible dangers, aware of others' safety, and particularly alert to 'kickback' and how to avoid it. As machines are at their best when in consistent use, it is wise to fire up your chainsaw on a regular basis.

That said, what do you look for and what do you need?

Ideally, two chainsaws: a small and a medium/large one. The small one for general work and the medium/large to saw through tree trunks, for felling, etc. A good compromise is medium-sized, not too heavy and with a good power-to-weight ratio.

Chainsaws have undergone considerable development in the last ten years, and now have

electronic engine management, new types of air filters, double-stemmed chain brakes, economical lean-burn engines and captive screws securing the bar and chain cover. Look at the cc of the engine and the power it can generate measured in kW and the weight – this is the power-to-weight ratio. Another thing to look for is build quality. Stihl, for example, produce two ranges of saws: their home/grounds/farm use versions and their professional forestry range. Always plump for the latter.

The two main manufacturers/brands on the market are Stihl and Husqvarna, followed by Echo. Makita also produce quality chainsaws that are available from tool suppliers. You will hear a lot of discussion on the merits of Stihl versus Husqvarna. For some reason, preferences are regional. Stihl predominates in England whilst Scotland seems to favour Husqvarna. Echo is a professional-quality brand manufactured in Japan that has long been plagued by the criticism that their saws have a poor power-to-weight ratio. Compare their CS-620SX, with 59.8 cc, 3.32 kW output and weighing 6.2 kg, to the Stihl MS 362 C-M, with 59.2 cc, 3.5 kW output, and 5.6 kg in weight. Echo seems to have woken up to this. Their new top-handled arborist saws are deemed better than the market leader and their new CS-390SX is well worth considering.

A minor revolution is taking place at the smaller

end of the range. Battery-powered saws are making an appearance with advances in technology. They are relatively quiet, quite powerful and non-polluting and the same battery can be used for other tools. Classification is much more difficult. Electric motors vary greatly in quality depending on the motor and battery. Stihl and Husqvarna offer quality products. New arrival Ego Power+ is an entirely electric range of tools that deserves attention.

You will need to sharpen your chain when it gets blunt, indicated by fine sawdust instead of chippings. You can have it professionally sharpened or do it yourself, with either a chain grinder – I recommend the Portek, or the Timberline, a precision device – or manually with a file. For this you need a vice, a saw chain file and a guide. Saw chains use an arcane system of classification. As a simple guide, check the size of the file to be used in mm, the length of the chainsaw bar and the width of the groove that it runs on. You will also need a small flat file to 'set the depth gauges'. Saw chains come in two basic configurations, chisel and semi-chisel. The difference is their 'bite', i.e. the width of the blade. Semi-chisel have narrow blades and are supplied mainly on non-professional saws. They are less prone to kickback. Full chisel have wider blades and are supplied on forestry

**Crispin Rogers** runs Logmatic UK and sells manual log splitters and associated equipment. He has been using chainsaws since about the age of 14 and currently owns four chainsaws.

saws. They take a larger bite and will cut faster.

Stihl chains are designed to be filed level, while Oregon chains are to be filed at an angle of 10% down. They claim this cuts faster. Chainsaws can be supplied with different length bars. As a rule of thumb, the blade follows the power: for example, medium saws have 16 in. blades, while medium/large ones have 18 in. blades. These are the optimum length recommended by the manufacturers. Longer or shorter blades can be fitted and the power will decrease/increase accordingly. It is all a question of reach and application.

There are several books on chainsaws, and I would recommend the following. Also, read your manual and other instruction brochures.

### To Fell a Tree: A Complete Guide to Successful Tree Felling and Woodcutting Methods

Jeff Jepson

Beaver Tree Publishing

www.treesource.co.uk

### Homeowner's Complete Guide to the Chainsaw

Brian J. Ruth & Jen W. Ruth

Fox Chapel Publishing

(published in US, available on amazon etc)

### Chainsaws: A History

David Lee

Harbour Publishing

(published in Canada, www.harbourpublishing.com)

\* Awarded by Lantra. There is also a City & Guilds qualification. Needed if chainsaw is to be used in public place, but generally for professional use.

## Chainsaw Comparison

Make	Model	CC	Power kW	Wt Kg	Power to Wt Ratio	Fuel cap	Electronic Engine Management	List Price £
<b>Small under 4 Kg</b>								
Stihl	MS 201 C-M	35.1	1.8	3.9	1:2.2	Flip up	Yes	798.00
Husqvarna	Do not make							
Echo	CS-361WES	35.8	1.49	3.8	1:2.6	Large lugs	Yes	395.00
<b>Medium up to 5 Kg</b>								
Stihl	MS 261 C-M	50.2	3.0	4.9	1:1.6	Flip up	Yes	744.00
Husqvarna	545	50.1	2.5	4.9	1:2	Flip up	Yes	618.00
Echo	CS-390SX	50.2	2.57	4.7	1:1.8	Large lugs	Yes	499.00
<b>Large up to 6 Kg</b>								
Stihl	362 CM	59.0	3.5	5.6	1:1.6	Flip up	Yes	912.00
Husqvarna	555	59.8	3.1	5.9	1:1.9	Flip up	Yes	660.00
Echo	CS-620SX	59.8	3.32	6.2	1:1.9	Screwdriver	Yes	779.00
<b>Battery Driven Wt and Price includes largest battery</b>								
Stihl	MSA 200 CB-Q		1.8	5.0	1:1.8	Flip up		557.00
Husqvarna	536Li XP		3.4	4.4	1:1.2	Flip up		630.00
Echo	Not Yet							



Graham Wood

# Space Invaders

Begin with identification and advice, then move on to science and muscle to keep these aliens at bay

When Conrad Loddiges introduced mauve flowering rhododendron to these isles in 1763, he could never have imagined that he was inflicting plant pestilence on Britain's forests and countryside. One of the 'big four' alien invasive plant species most frequently cited as major threats to native plants by the Forestry Commission and others, rhododendron is an aggressive coloniser whose control and removal has cost untold work hours and millions of pounds – an estimated £10m in Snowdonia National Park alone.

Protecting the native flora of Britain is a vast cooperative effort. If you've bought a woodland – or hope to one day – then controlling alien invasive species is now or will become part of the stewardship of your land. But be of stout heart. Your woodland may be lightly afflicted, if at all, and there is plenty of help and advice freely available to help you.

Rhododendron (*R. ponticum*) is an aggressive, thickly foliated evergreen bush that reduces plant biodiversity, has a negative effect on earthworms and birds and is toxic to humans. It harbours *Phytophthora*, a fungus-like pathogen that adversely affects other plants. A mature bush can produce up to one million seeds. Gamekeepers plant it as shelter for game species, making its eradication that much more difficult, especially in Scotland where *R. ponticum* is the most threatening invasive plant species in the country. It does have pretty flowers.

As does Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*), the tallest annual plant in Britain, an introduction to the UK in the 19th century. This species competes very effectively for nutrients, water and space, and significantly reduces biodiversity wherever it spreads. It favours damp locations and thrives on riverbanks. When it dies back, it leaves behind exposed mud, which then erodes into rivers, affecting fish and their spawning grounds.

Another of the 'big four', Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*), is a pest in woodlands, gardens and waterways. Japanese knotweed grows powerfully, pushing through tarmac and concrete; it reproduces vigorously; and it produces a rhizome system that can spread up to 7 metres from the



Giant hogweed cordoned off prior to removal



Himalayan balsam in bloom



Japanese knotweed



Invasive rhododendron

plant laterally and to a depth of 3 metres. Consequently, it suppresses and kills native vegetation. It regenerates from a tiny sliver and, once removed, is considered controlled waste and must be disposed of by burial at least 5 metres deep.

Giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) is not only bad for native flora, but its leaves and stems produce substances

toxic to humans: furocoumarins, that cause severe inflammation. If you were to touch the plant or brush against it and then expose the skin to sunlight, blistering would appear, lasting several weeks or even months. Giant hogweed grows to 3–4 metres in height, a commanding attribute which helps it to crowd out native vegetation and reduce biodiversity. Cutting it at ground level only

makes regrowth more vigorous.

A longer list would include Spanish bluebells, snowberry, bamboo, laurel and even sycamore, though there is much discussion about the last entry.

As you get to know your woodland, do keep an eye out for these four, or any others. One of the first things to do to aid the national control effort is to download the free PlantTracker app and report your finding. PlantTracker is an important tool in tracking the appearance of infestations. Look at the website for more information and scare yourself silly by checking the infestation maps.

The earlier an infestation is tackled, the easier eradication will be and the less damage will ensue. Consult the experts in this area, the Forestry Commission in the first instance if you find any of these invaders. The GB Non-native Species Secretariat is an excellent source of information and offers links to the latest information about methods of control, including organic ones. The Small Woodland Owners Group, the Woodland Trust and the Invasive Species Ireland website offer reliable information about dealing with invaders, and there is much wisdom to be gleaned from social media groups.

You may fear that an infestation on your land will require you to use glyphosate or other chemicals, or involve protective gear and sharp tools, but the scientists have been exploring other options. (There's an online Herbicide Advisor if that is your chosen route.)

For instance, the CABI has been trialling rust fungus, a plant parasite, as a natural means of controlling Himalayan balsam, particularly useful against a pest that grows in difficult-to-reach riverside areas.

Since 2010, the effectiveness of the psyllid bug *Aphalara itadori* is being assessed in England in an attempt to find a non-chemical method of reducing the vigour of Japanese knotweed.

At Inverewe Gardens, the National Trust for Scotland has been injecting herbicide directly into the stems of rhododendron to control the spread of seedlings. It causes rhododendron death within six months, making removal of the dead material less of a chore (we understand it makes very acceptable charcoal).

The best situation would be for aggressive, invasive species never to gain a foothold to begin with. Practice good biosecurity when visiting your woodland and when removing or introducing plants or soil. If you find an alien invader on your land, be sure to let your neighbours know so that together you can eradicate the farthest 'upstream' source of infestation and prevent later re-introduction.

#### Useful websites

forestry.gov.uk  
planttracker.org.uk  
swog.org.uk  
woodlandtrust.org.uk  
nonnativespecies.org  
himalayanbalsam.cabi.org  
invasivespeciesireland.com  
eforestry.gov.uk/forestdss/

# 'It's Always About the Spoon'

At last, Barn the Spoon has created Spōn, a handsome book about carving spoons and New Wood Culture



Debi Trelgar



Debi Trelgar

I 'can't pretend to have invented the spoon,' says Barn the Spoon, 'but I am completely obsessed with them. I can't imagine a life without making spoons. A good spoon is a beautiful thing.' Wooden spoons could have no more devoted, inspiring or irrepressible an evangelist than Barn the Spoon.

Surrounded by shavings of wood, carved and half-carved spoons, apprentices, his shave horse and tools and seated in the window of his shop on London's busy Hackney Road, Barn is a maker, a teacher, the co-organiser of Spoonfest with Robin Wood, the founder of The Green Wood Guild and now a published author. His first book, *Spon: A guide to spoon carving and the new wood culture*, was published (Penguin) on 25 May.

When Barn describes how to pronounce his book's title, it sounds as if it rhymes with 'gone'. 'In my head I've always said it like that,' he says. 'I love the concept behind it. It's derived from the Old Norse word that means a 'chip of wood'. That makes me happy. Penguin is responsible for the line over the 'o' – it's not a typo!'

This was Penguin's third attempt to entice Barn to create a book and it was worth the wait. *Spon* is a lovely thing to hold. It invites study. It contains everything

a spoon carver craves in a book from Barn the Spoon: chapters on raw materials, axes and knives and specialist tools, sharpening, the variety of grips to use in carving, a meticulous step-by-step chapter on carving a simple spoon then detailed and loving descriptions of 16 'cool traditional' spoon designs to inspire further exploration. 'I want people to see how beautiful and diverse they are,' he says. 'But they're really just a starting point.' Barn



also shares some of his personal history (see excerpt) and the lessons he has gleaned in his journey from many teachers, living in the woods and bringing spoons to the metropolis.

'I'm always ready to learn something new,' he says, and you realise he's probably speaking of more than just spoon carving. 'It's important to be open to learn.'

The other subject of *Spon* is new wood culture, a theme running through the book. 'The spoon is really the emblem of the new wood culture,' he says.

It is Barn's heartfelt belief that through spoon carving, we can connect with wood, with natural material, with the seasons, with form and utility and their joined beauty. He hopes we might slow down and lose ourselves in excellent tools and in detail. In the final chapter, 'New Wood Culture', Barn makes a plea for a new age 'where we are more connected to nature, sourcing energy where it is freely available from the sun and wind, and using materials sustainably harvested from diverse managed woodlands.'

He confesses, 'This book is really new wood culture propaganda. My takeaway from this book is that we get the cover, front and back – I love the cover – of it, on display in every

Waterstone's in the country and people see it and they start to talk about spoons.'

And next? Barn has a new 'latest project'. He is on the lookout for a ten-inch diameter woodland-grown alder. He's planning to carve 1,000 spoons from it. And with signature Barn the Spoon exuberance, he ends our conversation, 'I have enough spoon ideas to keep me busy for 1,000 lifetimes!'

# The Most Perfect Time

An excerpt from Barn the Spoon's *Spon*, about three transformative years he spent walking Britain's old ways

I had some friends who had walked the length of the country, sleeping outdoors and paying their way by playing folk music on the street, and village pubs. I decided I would do the same but with spoons.

Selling my spoons on the street taught me a lot of the sociological stuff about how to sell something you have made: how to make yourself approachable; what you should say to people; how to sit, even. Street-selling also taught me that many members of the public highly respect craftspeople, seeing them as humble, and as

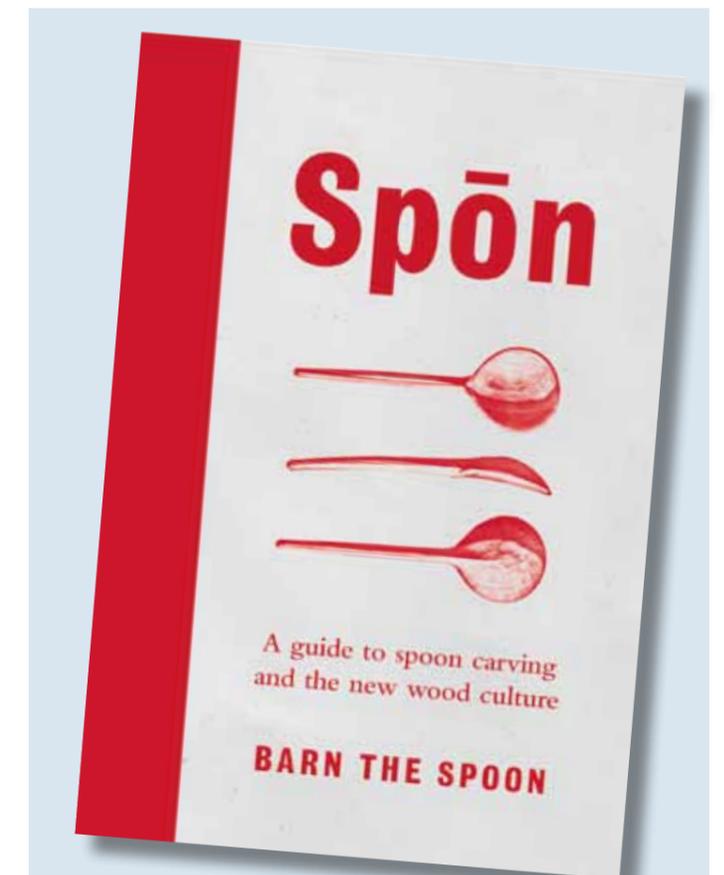
“I really had everything I needed”

providing a humble service or simple product. I learned that the price you put on a spoon has nothing to do with whether it sells or not; that the average person – me included, at least to begin with – hasn't the faintest clue as to how you might price something like a handmade wooden spoon.

I travelled alone for three years and it was a completely transformative journey for me. Walking for days along old ways and canal towpaths gave me time to think. I experienced life increasingly on a natural timescale, moving around on foot and stopping to gather wood for a fire, upon which I would make a cup of tea.

The most perfect time within this period was when I was living in a wood just outside Oxford, when I was able to develop a beautiful relationship with nature. After selling spoons on the city's streets I would go back to the woods. Walking through the trees at the end of the day I would find a piece of dead standing wood, or maybe a fallen branch hanging in a tree, set my tarp between branches and unravel my bed roll. This became my living room for the evening. I really had everything I needed. I'd take my shoes and socks off and sit cross-legged on my bed, then begin to process my firewood for the evening. I'd saw off nice straight bits to split into kindling, and then shave them down into feathersticks. I would light a little fire, which brought a great amount of warmth as I was so close to it and to the ground, and once the fire was really going I would reach into my pack for my metal

canteen cup and water flask. I would balance the cup on the firewood, being careful not to squash the embers, and after boiling I would put a spoonful of loose leaf Earl Grey tea into it; I liked Earl Grey as it doesn't need milk, which was a hassle to carry, and you can chuck the loose leaves onto the leaf litter. I garnered a huge sense of peace in being home from a day's work. When the time came for sleep I'd pull the burning coals apart ready for the morning, and would just have to lie back to be in bed. I would sit for hours just staring into the flames. If you do this as the night encroaches your world gets smaller and smaller, finally leaving you alone under the dark canopy with only what is lit by the fire.



from *Spon: A guide to spoon carving and the new wood culture* by Barn the Spoon pub Penguin, £20

# The Woodcutter, His Wife and Their New Life

**Daniel Patrick** on the costs and rewards of a life on the land

“Helping you economically heat your home with sustainable firewood from the Tanat Valley, by converting windfall and waste into manageable, clearly defined domestic carbon neutral fuel.” At least that is what my website says, but what does that mean? Is it just marketing blurb or a statement of intent, a road map for a sustainable way of life? Let me take you through what we do, why we do it and how we do it, what tools we use, what I have learnt so far and the profound effects my change of lifestyle has had on my family.

**What We Do**

I live with my wife and children on a four-acre smallholding in the Welsh Borders. The old part of the house is 400 years old and is heated almost entirely with logs. I first came here when I was seven when it was an Outdoor Study centre, owned by King Edwards School in Birmingham, and by the age of ten, I was telling people that one day I would live there. By 1992, when I began squatting at the house on weekends and holidays, the house had fallen into disrepair. Five years later I convinced the school to sell it to me. So for less than the cost of my wife’s Volvo, I bought this 400-year-old farmhouse with eight acres of land (reduced to four settling a dispute with a neighbour), and set off on a journey of independence and sustainability. Now, twenty years later, we manage to heat the place almost exclusively with logs and run a business providing low carbon firewood to heat others’ homes.

**Why Do We Do It**

I was admiring an axe in a garden centre one day when my wife offered to buy it for me if I gave up my day job in the corporate world and set up the firewood business, Tanat Valley Firewood, that I had been talking so much about. That sounds like a beginning, but, as with most beginnings, there was a long build-up before that moment.

I’d had a long career in logistics, a well-paid job in my chosen field. I lived in paradise and had a beautiful young family, yet one sunny Sunday afternoon my wife asked me why I was always so grumpy. The problem was that I had either been promoted to a position of incompetency or that

the demands of the job were unacceptable to me, travelling upwards of a thousand miles a week in my company car between transport depots, customers and suppliers. At around this time one of my brothers had given me a book on the virtues of working with your hands, which had rung loud bells with me.

In addition, I had struggled for years to find a firewood supplier who could tell me what they were supplying, what the unit of sale was (as opposed to a ‘load’), where it was from, what the moisture content



sell firewood locally, processing waste and windfall timber. Selling firewood is a lifestyle thing: you won’t make a lot of money, but you might just get rich in other ways.

**How Do We Do It**

We take local waste and windfall timber, process it into logs of different shapes and sizes and sell it back to the local community for domestic heating. It is a simple business model that has very few stages or transfers of ownership in the process. Generally the timber is tipped in the drop zone on the yard, processed, seasoned and then when under 20% moisture content, delivered to the end-user by me in my van. The logs are supplied in barrow bags that are a clearly defined unit of sale, tagged with the species, post code of origin and the moisture content. Prices are fixed and clearly shown on the website.

I have a small machine that lifts them into the van. Gravity is on my side coming out. Using a sack truck I am able to position them exactly where the customer wants them, more often than not stacking them neatly in their store, or leaving them in the weather proof bags. Traditionally, firewood is delivered in a ‘dumpy’ bag that is left on your drive and will need to be wheel-barrowed away before you can park your car on a wet and windy autumn evening! Customers receive an invoice giving all my details and that of the firewood. Generally payment is made by bank transfer giving full traceability of the transaction. One of my customers has received eight deliveries now but I have never met or spoken to her: an order is sent by message over the internet, the delivery is made, an invoice is sent and settled electronically.

I talk to as many firewood merchants as I can to give me a greater understanding of the industry and what my place in it could be. One chap told me how he used to employ three people, operate two processors, but found that he could not compete with farmers’ sons. So he took himself off to Latvia where he contracted with a group of farmers to supply him with a container of clear-felled, kiln-dried firewood each week. The environmental costs of clear felling, kiln drying and trucking across Europe horrify me, so I set out to meet up with farmers’ sons myself. Sure enough, I came across a local chap in my area who worked on his father’s and uncle’s thousand acre farm, doing a standard 60 hour week for £50 and board and lodgings. He is 21 and has been selling firewood for ten years, buying his first chainsaw at the age of 13. He is not only customer-focused but

was and why it came to be firewood. Living in a rural area, surrounded by woodland and farmland, I started to buy fallen trees from farming neighbours and other local landowners.

So for me, giving up my career in logistics to process firewood for sale was a combination of push and pull factors that has had a profound effect on me and my family. It gave me a connection to the land and the locality that I craved and was one of the determining factors in my move here in the first place. Driven by my desire for independence and sustainability, I took the opportunity to upscale my domestic logging activity, give up my day job and

# ENTERPRISE

listens. He comes in a £140k tractor, towing a trailer that has been loaded with a tele-handler, equipment that I cannot dream of affording, financed by the farm and hired by him on a daily rate to process and deliver the timber. With his help I am better able to meet the growing demand for my firewood.

We live one mile up a steep hill, so to reduce the need to haul heavy green timber up the hill I lease a cluster of barns and a yard a mile down the road, on the valley floor, keeping tractors and trailers on the valley road rather than in the lanes. One of the barns is across the river, accessed by a weak bridge where the children play pooh sticks and where we have developed a campsite, enabling a work-life balance that was elusive to me in the corporate world.

### What Tools We Use

The axe I was admiring the day my wife challenged me to give up my day job was a Fiskars X27 splitting axe and it does what it says on the label with grace and precision. If I said that you only need to shake it at a log and it would fall apart that would be a minor exaggeration! I have a number of other sizes of axe from the same company: they require no fuel, other than the standard five a day, make no noise and provide a clean cut with no burr.

As you cannot run a firewood business on axe-splitting alone, I use a HyCrack cone-splitter that produces 40T at the tip directly off the PTO (power take off, supplied from a tractor), which will split anything that you can physically lift onto it. I have stalled the old tractor a couple of times as it is not up to such hydraulic power. The tractor is older than I am, left to me by a close friend and neighbour who killed himself, leaving a note on the kitchen counter asking for the Patricks to have the dog.

It also came with a saw bench that is just waiting to take your fingers off. Another tool that earns its living is a four wheel drive, 3.5T articulated dumper truck which we affectionately refer to as the death trap – slightly unfair, as the steering wheel no longer comes away in our hands.

With a yard full of ash and oak waiting to be split, I have this week invested in a professional forestry saw, which cost more than two weeks' housekeeping. Life is too short to enter into the Stihl/Husqvarna debate, but if you have a spare £600 and need a saw that will cut all day long with ease then a MC261 is worth looking at. Other saws and ways of severing major arteries are available.

### What Have I Leant So Far

I struggle to make a living out of selling firewood. I expected to be able to work a four-day week, sell £30k worth of logs and live happily ever after. Dream on. Timber represents 40% of the sale price and my insurance is £1000 a year, so I don't get even the minimum wage and my wood is more on the expensive side at approximately £100 a cube. Sales drop in the summer. I offer a volume discount but only rich people with large houses and log stores take advantage of this;

we have not been able to afford a summer holiday since I gave up 'work' and may only take one this year thanks to the generosity of wealthy parents.

There is a law of unforeseen consequences. My aim was to spend more time with the children. Being around more during the working week meant that I was able to get more involved, taking the kids to school, cooking family meals and spending quality time with my wife, Beth, who bakes celebration cakes. The lack of income meant that the cakes that used to provide for luxuries such as iPads and holidays became an essential source of income, especially in the summer months. She took on all the cakes that she could, worked tirelessly to keep us going to a point when she said that she was thinking of leaving me. After 16 weekly Relate sessions we realised that we had not considered enough what we would lose by my giving up my day job.

We have learnt to listen more to each other and there is light at the end of the tunnel as we work together to increase the scale of the business to spread the fixed costs over a larger output of timber.

I still struggle with how best to spend my time: do I concentrate on what I am good at, that is sales, marketing and distribution, buying in the firewood in bulk from local suppliers at a reduced margin, or spending my days processing timber? I don't have all the answers, but do have a load of questions about burning fossil fuels, about the life that our children will lead and how they will ever be able to afford to buy a house, what will happen after Brexit and what may happen as the new masters of the universe flex their inexperienced muscles. In the meantime I will continue to chop logs and trade with local people, processing their waste and windfall into manageable, clearly defined domestic carbon-neutral fuel and hope that with a fair wind I will be able to maintain my home and family and that my wife sticks with me.

I used to think that the achievement of dreams was all about hard work. I have now come to realise that it is more about sacrifice. Hard work is a given. Luck plays a large part and the harder you work the luckier you become.



**Daniel Patrick** is Chief Woodcutter of Tanat Valley Firewood, a provider of sustainable wood fuel. [www.tanatvalleyfirewood.co.uk](http://www.tanatvalleyfirewood.co.uk) or follow him on [facebook.com/tanatvalleyfirewood](https://www.facebook.com/tanatvalleyfirewood)



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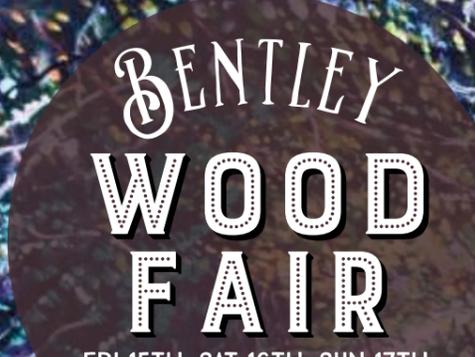
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# The Long View

*'In their stillness the trees are a pause. On ridges they stand, guardians of the landscape they survey. In tree time, the months of winter slumber are simply part of a rhythm. They call me to be still.'*

**T**he Long View has been a project celebrating the value and beauty of trees, and the importance of the natural environment and our connection with it. Now it is about to become an exhibition and a book. Photographer Rob Fraser and writer Harriet Fraser have chosen seven isolated trees, spread like a constellation across Cumbria, and got to know them over two years – hundreds of walks and many hours sitting with the trees, in all weathers, all seasons, day and night.

The individual Long View trees are not remarkable for their antiquity or their size. What drew Harriet and Rob to them is the way they 'fit' in their environments. In landscapes where seeds have a tough job to get established, or saplings face the threat of wind, sheep nibbling or disease, these seven trees have become firmly established. They are like sentinels – proud specimens of their individual species, standing up for trees in general.

*split rock  
flying rowan  
above us  
ravens*

The National Trust, Woodland Trust, Lake District National Park, Friends of the Lake District and Natural England are among the partners and funders for this project. Rob and Harriet have spent time with them and with local farmers to discover more about landscape management and the natural and cultural history in each location. In 2016 they travelled to the trees with more than 350 people over several walks to share what they've learnt, and what inspires them.

The Long View exhibition will be on show in the galleries at Grizedale Forest, as part of the Forest Art Works programme, from June 21st – August 31st 2017 and will then be in Newcastle, Oxford and Brighton early in 2018. You can follow progress on the project at [www.thelongview.today](http://www.thelongview.today) or via [www.somewhere-nowhere.com/projects/the-long-view](http://www.somewhere-nowhere.com/projects/the-long-view).

The book, *The Long View*, is available as a full colour softback (176 pages) from Harriet and Rob Fraser, ISBN 978-0-9955042-2-6

**Harriet and Rob** work collaboratively as 'somewhere-nowhere' – their previous projects have included Land Keepers ([www.landkeepers.co.uk](http://www.landkeepers.co.uk)) which explored the lives of upland farmers in Cumbria and resulted in an exhibition seen by more than 40,000 people.

Rob Fraser

# Great Woodland Bake Out

**Liz Watson and Michelle Stevens** trial the Svante Freden Reflector Oven

**A** hhhh, the aroma of woodland in spring: fresh green leaves, pine needles, rich humus, rhubarb crumble...

Yes, rhubarb crumble!  
And freshly baked bread.

Liz Watson, a Landscape Architect from Yorkshire, with combined passions for woodland and food, joined her friend Michelle Stevens in Moreby Wood, near York, to trial the Svante Freden Reflector Oven and to answer the intriguing culinary question, 'Just how many things is it possible to bake well in one day, next to the fire?'

## The Oven

Ideal for camping, back packing, cycling and canoe trips where light-weight, small cooking equipment can add a generous touch of luxury to your camp kitchen, the Svante Freden fireside oven packs up to a thin parcel no thicker than 10 x 250 x 330 mm and weighs just 800 g.

Reflector ovens of one type or another have been used for a couple of centuries at least. There is written evidence of this principle being employed on the hearth of Dutch households more than 200 years ago and the pioneers in 19th century North America seem to have made good use of them for outdoor cooking.

This particular model is made to the design of Swedish canoeist, Svante Freden, and is available from UK retailer Pro Adventure for £50. For the engineers out there, Svante also gives advice on making your own, in a handy PDF available on his website.

## General Performance

The oven can be assembled from flat pack in less than a minute. Remove the strap, open and rotate the locking latch, fit the square leg at the rear and a double wire shelf. Easy.

During the trial, a big advantage was that the handle on top stayed quite cool and the oven is very light-weight, so that the whole thing could simply be picked up to check on the cooking and the contents rotated without wearing your knees out. Adjustments to heat levels were made by simply placing the oven closer to the fire or adding a few extra sticks. The manufacturer notes say that it's 'a good idea to keep an eye on the lower part of the oven so it doesn't melt. It happens easily when you try to get more heat into the oven'. This wasn't a problem during our test. Recipe cooking



times are not really applicable due the number of variables such as size of fire, wind and air temperature, but just like at home, once you can smell the dish cooking you know it's nearly ready.

Shiny internal surfaces reflect the heat very efficiently, even with a small fire and low flames. The whole dish cooks well, though, contrary to Svante's prediction, we found the heat was higher closer to the fire rather than the back of the oven, necessitating turning once or twice during the cooking time. The shelf is perfectly strong enough for lightweight cookware such as Trangia pans, Victoria sandwich and small loaf tins. Items cooked in low-sided tins and dishes and in smaller unit sizes were the most successful.

The two friends each baked a main course, bread, dessert and cake and Michelle impressed the judges with her bonus dish of cheese and hazelnut scones, though the final scores were not affected as everyone was declared a winner.

Overall, the woodland bakers were enormously delighted with the ovens, which weighed very little, were easy to assemble and on the cooking front exceeded expectations, resulting in a magnificent spread, which was much appreciated by the growing numbers of family and friends who appeared amongst the bluebells.

[www.proadventure.co.uk](http://www.proadventure.co.uk)

**Michelle's Bonus Dish.** Extra points were awarded to Michelle for her impressive savoury scones from a shop-bought scone mix (with added milk and chopped nuts), the ideal ending for our carb-loading, butter-smearing weekend.



The baking results

MAIN COURSE	<p><b>LIZ</b></p> <p>Trout with lemon and capers, steamed beans and sprouts with plum tomatoes baked in parcels of parchment</p> 	<p><b>MICHELLE</b></p> <p>Hake with lemon, asparagus, baby corn and green beans, again in parchment package</p> 	<p><b>COMMENTS</b></p> <p>The best results came when portions were kept small and the veg cooked separately to the fish so that varying cooking times could be managed more easily. The parchment kept the fish really moist and helped to steam the vegetables (cut fine).</p>
	<p><b>BREAD</b></p> <p>Golden grain loaf, baked as a 400g loaf and a tray of rolls</p> 	<p>Ciabatta, cooked in two Victoria sandwich tins</p> 	
DESSERT	<p>Rhubarb crumble, with an oat and nut crumble mix, baked in individual pie dishes and served with crème fraiche</p> 	<p>Apple and blackberry pie</p> 	<p>Simply the best rhubarb crumble ever tasted! The small tins worked really well and they baked in no time. The fruit pie, in its classic enamel pie plate was also delicious, no soggy bottoms here! The pastry, made from scratch by Michelle, was crisp and short and the apple, which had been grated, was cooked beautifully.</p>
	<p><b>CAKES</b></p> <p>Lemon and poppy seed drizzle cake with a sugar crust</p> 	<p>Raspberry and ground almond cake</p> 	

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# Crowning Glory

**George Smith** is a new convert to the traditional skill of making a Crown Windsor chair

**T**he joining instructions stated the course would commence each day 'promptly at 8.30 am.' So at 8.30 am sharp one Monday morning in early spring, I assembled with seven other keen 'recruits' in a circle within the Windsor Workshop's well-equipped purpose-built workshop at Churchfield Farm near Pulborough, West Sussex. It was the first morning of a five-day course learning to make a Crown Windsor chair.

The literature had stated that previous experience wasn't necessary, but as we went round the circle – at the invitation of our teacher – introducing ourselves and outlining our previous woodworking experience, my confidence began to wane.

Several members were experienced chair makers attending the course to enhance their skills. This was the eighth course – and eighth different Windsor chair – for one new colleague. A chair maker from Brazil had travelled to the UK specifically to learn the 'English style' of Windsor chair making.

Suddenly it was my turn to speak: previous chair making experience – nil. Any experience of working with wood? Well, I own woodland and am qualified in the use of a chainsaw! I was reassured by the encouraging words of James Mursell, the owner of the farm and principal teacher of the company. James established the Windsor Workshop 12 years ago to offer a variety of courses, each dedicated to making a different style of Windsor chair. In addition, he makes and sells specialist chair making tools, writes frequently on the subject, including his own book *Windsor Chairmaking*, and is an acknowledged expert on the subject. Throughout the five days he was an excellent teacher and host.

Following the introductions, James explained the workshop and tools, gave us detailed sets of plans, a daily course programme and allocated each of us a workbench and a partner. Fortunately, I was paired with David, a retired rocket scientist with experience in chair making.



*The Windsor Workshop course members with their Crown Windsor chairs. George Smith, far right*

During the five days we would learn all the necessary fundamental principles and techniques of Windsor chair making. We undertook most of the work with hand tools using traditional techniques in use for the past 200 years. We used locally sourced English ash for most of the chair, and tulip wood for the seat. From the outset the comradeship within the group was excellent – with a helping hand always there if required.

By day two the group commitment was clearly evident. Although the official start time was 8.30 am, each day we were busy at our benches by 8.00 am. For me, the afternoon of the second day was the hardest and most painful for my ageing back, standing bent over a piece of wood held on the ground between my feet, cautiously swinging a curved adze to chisel out a seat for what seemed an eternity.

We crossed the yard for coffee and lunch breaks at James's rather splendid family house. The excellent fresh, local food (included in the course fee), setting and company were a memorable feature of the course.

Five days of steam bending, turning, spindle making, drilling, shaping, sanding, assembling and gluing passed quickly. Under James's expert

tuition, we each succeeded in making a Windsor chair of which to be proud. Immediately after we posed for the end-of-course photograph, our Brazilian colleague dismantled his chair, left unglued by design, and packaged it for the return flight home.

The course has inspired me to invest in woodworking tools and to develop my garage into a workshop – and I continue to refer to the excellent Windsor Workshop website for help and advice. Would I sign up for another course? Yes – most likely. Well, there are other styles of Windsor chairs that would fit nicely in the hall of our house!

[www.thewindsorworkshop.co.uk](http://www.thewindsorworkshop.co.uk)

**George Smith** is the retired head of Brighton CID, formerly Detective Chief Inspector involved in counter-terrorism investigation, a woodland owner and a Trustee of the Board of the Small Woods Association.



*At the bench, the chair takes shape*



Vahva Jussi 400 logging trailer

# A Moving Experience

**Carlton Boyce** on equipment to consider for mechanical extraction

If you cut wood, sooner or later you'll need to shift it. While younger readers may be happy to expend 5,000 calories a day doing it by hand, I'm content to enjoy whatever mechanical advantage I can.

If you've only got a few logs to move, you can just throw them in the back of a pickup, estate car, or domestic trailer. But wood is heavy, unyielding stuff and it will quickly destroy anything that isn't specifically designed for the job. That means you're probably looking at buying a proper logging trailer, preferably one with a winch and preferably a hydraulic winch at that. You'll also need something to tow it with. Neither will be cheap, but 'It's better to cry once when you buy something than to cry every time you use it.'

Consider a lightweight trailer like the ATV Timber Trailer manufactured by TCF Engineering. It is light enough to be towed by a quad bike or ATV, but sturdy enough to carry logs too heavy to load single-handed. Optional extras include a simple loading boom with a hand winch. Expect

to pay around £1,000 for the basic trailer and another £500 for some worthwhile extras, all plus VAT. Not cheap, but it's fully galvanized and likely to last the hobbyist a lifetime.

For hydraulic power – and once you've tried it, you'll never go back – try something like the TCF Engineering Low Impact Forwarder Trailer. Designed to be towed by a tractor, the crane plugs straight into the hydraulic system for a genuine plug 'n' play experience.

Not everyone has a tractor, or a five-figure sum to splash out on a trailer. My solution was to buy (eBay, two-year search, just under £5,000) a second hand Vahva Jussi 400 timber trailer with a 4-metre hydraulic crane and winch. It came with a separate Honda engine and powerpack to drive the hydraulics, which will lift more than 500 kg close in, and more than 250 kg at full reach – ample for what I do. It is massively over-engineered and very heavy as a result. While I could pull it behind my Polaris Ranger 400, it was a struggle at times.

Which brings us to the biggest problem with using a commercial logging trailer: most of them aren't road-legal. This means that while you're fine taking them to and from the woods behind a tractor, you can't tow them on the road behind a pickup or 4x4, severely limiting their usefulness. And you do not want to leave them in your woods.

While people like TCF Engineering do build road-going forwarders (with a minimum price of £10,000 plus VAT), they're top-heavy, so you wouldn't want to tow one in any case. That aside, a full-size logging trailer does have its advantages. They may be hard to find, but they tend to hold their value, and that eases the whole-life cost of ownership.

They can also be fitted with a variety of extras. Mine came with a proper load bed insert and a bucket. A quick-change hydraulic coupling turned it into a mini-excavator with which I could dig holes and trenches, and load sand, soil and gravel. This versatility helped ease the pain of spending so much on what is a hobby.

As far as tractors go: a garden-scale, mini tractor might look appealing, but it's essentially a toy for rich folk and so it – and its accessories – will cost more than a full-size tractor and implements.

A full-size tractor will be more useful, the choice will be wider, and you can pick them up at any farm sale or auction, which helps in picking a good 'un. If I were looking, I'd plump

for an old grey Fergie as I'm a fair-weather arborist, but if you like to slog it out in all weathers, then a more modern tractor with a proper cab and a heater would better fit the bill. Four-wheel-drive is always nice to have but probably not essential. Three thousand pounds should be enough to get your hands on something decent that's likely to retain its value.

Is your woodland on a slope? Then look at a four-wheel-drive Alpine tractor. Yes, it'll be more expensive than a more traditional model, but the residual values are equally good and the low centre of gravity makes it far safer to use on undulating ground.

They are also available with a centre pivot, a useful feature that helps maneuverability. I found a low-mileage, almost new model for £10,000, which would have been just the thing to tow my Vahva Jussi forwarder. Thus equipped, I'd have been all but unstoppable, yet the low ground pressure tyres would've been light on environmental damage.

Now, a couple of pointers when buying a new trailer. A twin-axle trailer will probably be configured to have a 'walking axle', which makes it easier to drive over fallen trees and negotiate uneven ground. This, coupled with wide, low-pressure tyres, will allow you to keep mobile no matter the condition underfoot.

A spec option may be a hydraulically-driven third wheel, positioned above the twin wheels on either side, providing drive to the trailer's wheels by bearing down on the tyre tread. It looks a bit Heath Robinson but works well and it takes the pressure off the towing vehicle. Maybe not necessary with a tractor, but an essential upgrade for a quad or ATV.

As with so much of life, all choices are a compromise between cost, ease of use, and fun. I've just sold my top-of-the-range forwarding trailer. It was enormous fun, and made shifting even huge logs a doddle, but it was just too heavy and hard into get to the places I needed it to be. I'd made the rookie mistake of buying equipment with an eye on the sort of life I wanted to lead, rather than the life I actually led.

I'm planning to settle for a simple logging arch pulled by my Polaris Ranger. I'll use the ATV's front-mounted winch to haul stuff close enough to chain to the trailer and then pull it out on the ground. I will lose some flexibility, and the bark will get covered in soil, but I'm pretty sure I can do 90% of the jobs I need to do with this relatively simple, lightweight, and cheap combination.

ATV Timber Trailer



# Swill Times Ahead



Traditional oak swill basket made by Lorna Singleton

**Irving Wilson** learns to prepare riven oak for basket weaving and recalls Shakespeare's witches: *'Double, double, toil and trouble; Fire burn, and cauldron bubble!'*

The oak swill was particular to the Furness area of south Cumbria, being a strong, shallow oval basket made from hazel and oak. This was widely used in local industry for carrying charcoal, coal, iron ore and anywhere a strong container was required.

The baskets are made by boiling oak billets that are split by hand to give thin flexible strips of oak that can be woven around the hazel rim. Today there are only a small number of craftspeople still producing oak swill baskets.

Weekend in the Woods 2016, organised by the Coppice Association North West, provided the opportunity to work through the process of making the oak swill material, that is, the process of converting lumps of oak into strips of weaving quality and looking at how the material can be woven into simple articles.

Our tutor was Lorna Singleton, a graduate of the Bill

Hogarth Memorial Apprentice Trust apprentice scheme and one of the few remaining swillers. She is also exploring contemporary ways to use the riven oak for furniture and fashion.

Of course the secret to any recipe (see below) is how to use the ingredients and tools to give the perfect outcome. This is where Lorna's years of experience and the feel for how the material is riving shone through.

Lorna guided us through the process and reviewed our initial attempts to rive thin swills. 'It will split again'. With practice it was possible to feel and control the rive, pressuring the thicker section to prevent the split running out. Eventually a pile of riven material, to a standard suitable for weaving, started to accumulate.

Could we repeat the process? Yes, I think so, provided we could source the right material and find a big enough tank. There was also time to weave some simple baskets to get the feel for how supple and workable the riven material is when wet. Perhaps a full oak swill basket will be the next challenge.

If you get a chance to try it out, do have a go. Look out for Lorna's courses. It's amazing to see how a solid, rigid tree trunk can be transformed into a thin, flexible strip suitable for weaving into swill baskets.

Lorna's Recipe for perfect riven oak is as follows:

**Ingredients:**

- Freshly felled oak log 100 to 150 mm diameter (we used peeled oak)
- Water

**Tools required**

- Axe and wedges
- Wooden maul and knockers (various sizes)
- Froe
- Riving knives (various sizes)
- Knife
- Old towels
- Steel tank about 1.5 m long
- Firewood
- Heat resistant gloves
- Cleaving brake

1. Ensure the log is from the bottom 3 m of the tree and free of significant knots or epicormic growth.
2. Cut log into lengths between 1.0 and 1.5 m, dependant on final product and size of tank.
3. Set the steel tank on some low supports and fill with water, leaving space for the wood billets. Set a fire but do not light until tank is loaded with wood.
4. Cleave the log in half through the centre with the axe and wedges. It should split easily. If not, it may not be worth continuing as you may encounter further problems later in the process.
5. Using the froe, split each half into 3 or 4 billets using the cleaving brake to give pieces of equal thickness. Cleave the heartwood from the sapwood and retain the sapwood. Discard the heartwood. This can be used for furniture making if required.
6. Immerse the sapwood billets in the tank, light the fire and bring to the boil for several hours then allow to stand overnight. In the morning, relight the fire and boil again for several hours. The water and surfaces of the oak will turn a dark inky black.
7. Health and Safety Warning: Tie some 'heat resistant' towels around each knee to allow you to grip the hot billet between the knees for riving.
8. Carefully lift a 'cooked' billet from the tank and, holding it firmly between the knees, using a large riving knife and knocker, start to split the wood lengthways. The split may be made radially ('lat ways') or tangentially 'back ways') depending on how the wood behaves.
9. Carefully continue to split each piece in half and half again, carefully adjusting the rive, using the thumbs to pressure the thicker part to ensure the split does not run out, until you have oak strips that are an even width, flexible and suitable for weaving.
10. Final dressing can be undertaken with a knife held stationary on the knee moving the oak strip until it is flexible and an even thickness throughout. With practice you should be able to feel any minor variations in thickness and stiffness which can be trimmed to give uniform flexibility throughout the length.

Thanks to Michelle, Simon, Mike, Dan and Dennis and Lorna for their gracious assistance.

coppicenorthwest.org.uk lornasingleton.co.uk

LIVINGWOODSMAGAZINE.CO.UK



Wilson Irving

Lorna tending the boiling oak



Lorna Singleton riving oak



Wilson Irving

Weaving oak swill at Weekend in the Woods

# Not a Bit Old Stool

Green Wood Stools  
By Alison Ospina  
Published by Stobart Davies Ltd., £18  
Review by Barry Mays

Now here's a thing. Just the other day I was wondering what Alison Ospina was up to since her book *Green Wood Chairs* was published in 2009. A few days later, ping! I got an email from Nancy Wood asking if I'd be interested in reviewing a new book called *Green Wood Stools* by Alison Ospina. So now I know what Alison's been up to in the last few years: among other things, breaking her knee, putting together a new book, and making Sean the sheep – more about Sean later.

Like Alison, I am also a maker, published author and occasional teacher of green wood crafts, so I have often thrown a nod of camaraderie over the water in the direction of West Cork since reading *Green Wood Chairs*.

What would a whole book devoted solely to stools be like? I am very happy to report that (metaphorically speaking) she's nailed it. *Green Wood Stools*, like *Green Wood Chairs*, is a delightfully wrapped package delivered straight from the heart.

The humble stool is the most overlooked, underrated and abused item knocking around the home, not normally even given the status of being described as a piece of furniture. Yet it is one of the oldest, most useful, versatile, and very often one of the most beautiful utility items that we will ever own.

Better still, unlike most other pieces of furniture, making a stool is within the capabilities of just about everybody. Making them out of coppiced green wood, Alison explains, can bring out our primal creative instincts. It is also very often the first step that you will take down the green wood path of discovery and fulfilment of creating something out of nature with your own hands.

This is the underlying message that Alison so eloquently puts across in her books. It establishes her as a modern day ambassador for the ancient art of working with green wood, in the round.

Green woodworking in all of its manifestations loosely falls into two categories when it comes to furniture: that which is made from riven/cleft wood and that which is made from wood in the round.

The former constructions, with their inherent quality of massive strength and predictably traditional design and appearance, normally with no bark remaining, are the stuff of heirlooms. They will appeal to those people who favour the left side



Ben Russell

Alison Ospina

**“A part of us goes into everything we make, the stools and chairs I make are imbued with my spirit. It can't be helped, that is the way”** Alison Ospina

of their brain, or Yang, as Alison explains on page 25 – this being the more masculine, rational and balanced, intellectual way. The latter constructions are those created from a pile of erratically shaped coppiced rods, particularly hazel, that are intuitively assembled with help from the right side of the brain, or Ying – this being the more feminine, flowing, empathetic, giving way.

Like everything, both methods of green woodworking have their merits and skill sets that inevitably cross over and merge to produce some stunning and timeless sculptural furniture with delightful aesthetics. *Green Wood Stools*, just like *Green Wood Furniture*, deals exclusively with the latter – working intuitively with wood in the round – and it is in this realm, like no other, that you can kick off the shackles of conformity and find your own creative self.

*Green Wood Stools* is an A4 size paperback with a glossy cover, well put together to withstand the constant thumbing that it will inevitably receive when the reader dips in and out of it. The 144 pages are laid out in logically sequenced chapters and very readable script. It is crammed with beautiful full colour photographs of a large variety of stools ranging across plank-topped, fabric-topped, woven, painted, carved, three- and four-legged, tall and short. Illustrated guidelines on how to make generic designs also pepper the pages, but the underlying message is the same – have a go at making one yourself. This book will suggest what you can do.

This is why Alison's books, in my opinion, are so important. They are the only notable published material I have found recently (this side of the Atlantic) on the subject. This method of working with minimal manipulation of the natural material, with respect and co-operation, is a feast for the mind, body and spirit, and a sanctuary from our fast and stressful modern world. A very creative and liberating craft of this kind deserves far more respect than that which is normally given from the old-school green woodworking traditionalists.

*Green Wood Stools* is far more wide-reaching than a 'how to' book. In it, the humble stool, formerly hidden in a dark corner like the ugly duckling, emerges as a little work of art in its own understated right. Alison's book is refreshingly unconventional, inspiring, with an undeniable sense of fun.

And what about Sean the sheep? You will remember I said that Alison broke her knee and for four months she was obliged to sit with her leg up on a low footstool.

Sometimes we all need to stop what we're doing, look back and examine our wake. With convalescing time on her hands, Alison came to really appreciate the usefulness of stools, and with this new respect, set about refining her previous designs in her head

to incorporate splayed legs which make the piece more stable and graceful. Perhaps she could also experiment with alternative seating materials other than planks of wood? Why not liven them up a bit with some decoration?

The stool on which she rested her leg had a sheepskin draped over the top to make it more comfortable. One day, while appreciating how comforting and pleasing to the eye this makeshift stool was, she had her epiphany moment, and decided to design a stool upholstered with a local sheepskin.

The following year she successfully created the prototype, which led to Google commissioning her to make taller versions for their offices in Dublin in 2015. The Google stool is pictured on page 77 of the book, but for me the more appealing version is the smaller one on page six. I want one. And perhaps this is a reminder that for every negative thing in our lives, a positive thing will always emerge as a result – even if we don't see it at the time. Alison's enforced inactivity led to a new appreciation for the humble stool, an enlightened flurry of creative activity, and the making of another inspiring and empowering book.

*Green Wood Stools*, then, is a book about stools, made in the round from green/unseasoned coppiced rods, traditional 'know-how' and creative assembly. Freedom! Buy it, read it, and have a go at making a stool of your very own. Then, make another. It could literally change your life.

Alison Ospina lives and works in West Cork where she is a teacher and maker of green wood chairs and stools and runs courses from her workshops at home. She has published three books. [www.greenwoodchairs.com](http://www.greenwoodchairs.com)  
Barry Mays is a green wood craftsman, designer and furniture maker, and the author of a *The Green Wood Companion*. [www.barrymays.co.uk](http://www.barrymays.co.uk)



Ben Russell

Sean the Sheep Stool

# WILDERNESS – GATHERING

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## LETTERS

Dear Nancy,

Really glad to see you focus on 'Shelter' (LW issue 43) as it has proved to be such a thorn in our experience of woodland management.

I would like to point out something of concern. On page 15 of this Spring Issue 2017 in Carlton Boyce's primer on planning law in Woodlands, there is an end note which says, 'If you live in a National Park, the Broads.... then the law is considerably more complex'. This is not true for permitted development rights for agricultural and forestry purposes – or should not be the case. However, the planning authorities responsible for these areas, at least in our case at Dartmoor National Park, sometimes hold a more limited definition of what they believe is 'reasonably necessary for forestry'.

Personally I think it is very important to stand up for the basic needs of woodland management, in particular for those structures which help make woodland restoration viable such as a wood-drying barn if you sell firewood. We need to work with the local planning



Roger Bamber / Alamy Stock Photo

department to help educate them as to what 21st century forestry requires.

The narrow legal definition of 'forestry' does not help. Maybe this year's 'Tree Charter' work will help further this goal and foster better understanding of small woodland management needs and get this onto the government agenda.

Yours truly  
Doug King-Smith

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# A Passion for Trees

**F**elix Dennis was a true original. First a successful publisher (Dennis Publishing), then a poet and spoken-word performer, then founder of The Heart of England Forest, Felix Dennis was the only person ever to, in effect, turn magazines back into trees.

## Whosoever Plants a Tree

Whosoever plants a tree  
Winks at immortality.

Woodland cherries, flowers ablaze,  
Hold no hint of human praise;

Hazels in a hidden glade  
Give no thought to stake or spade;

London planes in Georgian squares  
Count no patrons in their prayers;

Seed and sapling seek no cause,  
Bark and beetle shun applause;

Leaf and shoot know nought of debt,  
Twig and root are dumb— and yet

Choirs of songbirds greet each day  
With eulogies, as if to say:

'Whosoever plants a tree  
Winks at immortality!'

## I have wasted the day...

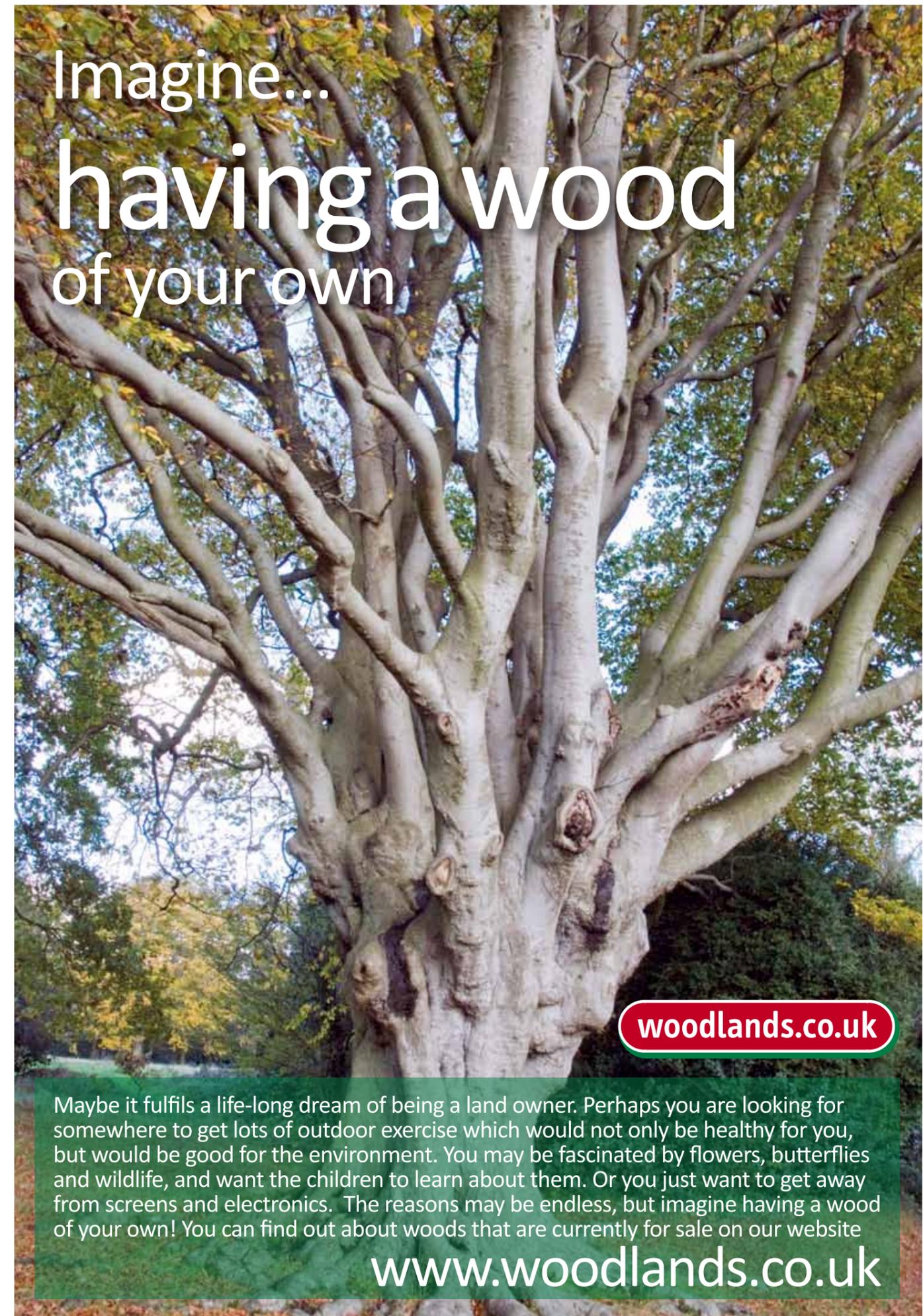
I have wasted the day in the fields and the lanes,  
I have tramped in the leaves and the mud;  
I have dined upon air and scrumpled me a pear  
And an apple the colour of blood.

Though my fingers are purple from blackberry  
stains,  
Though my hair is a tangle of straw;  
Though my jacket was torn upon bramble and  
thorn,  
My binoculars bent in a foolish ascent –  
It was worth it for all that I saw.

It was worth all the aches, it was worth all the  
pains –  
I have rambled and scrambled and raced;  
And my elbow is scratched and my coat must be  
patched,  
And I waded in brooks and neglected my books,  
And I startled a hare (and the taste of that pear!)  
What a waste, what a glorious waste!

'Whosoever Plants A Tree' and 'I Have Wasted a Day' by Felix Dennis, taken from *Tales From The Woods* (Ebury 2010), reproduced by kind permission of the Literary Executors of the Felix Dennis Estate.

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