NO 46 WINTER 2017 £5.00

Living Woods
MAGAZINE

SULLY'S TREES:
A FRENCH DUKE'S
LEGACY

TOOL
SHARPENING

A TRUG
IN A DAY

WINTER WORK:
SEASON OF RENEWAL
PLANS, TOOLS, TREE ID

PLUS WOODLANDS AWARDS,
FOREST BATHING AND BEN LAW

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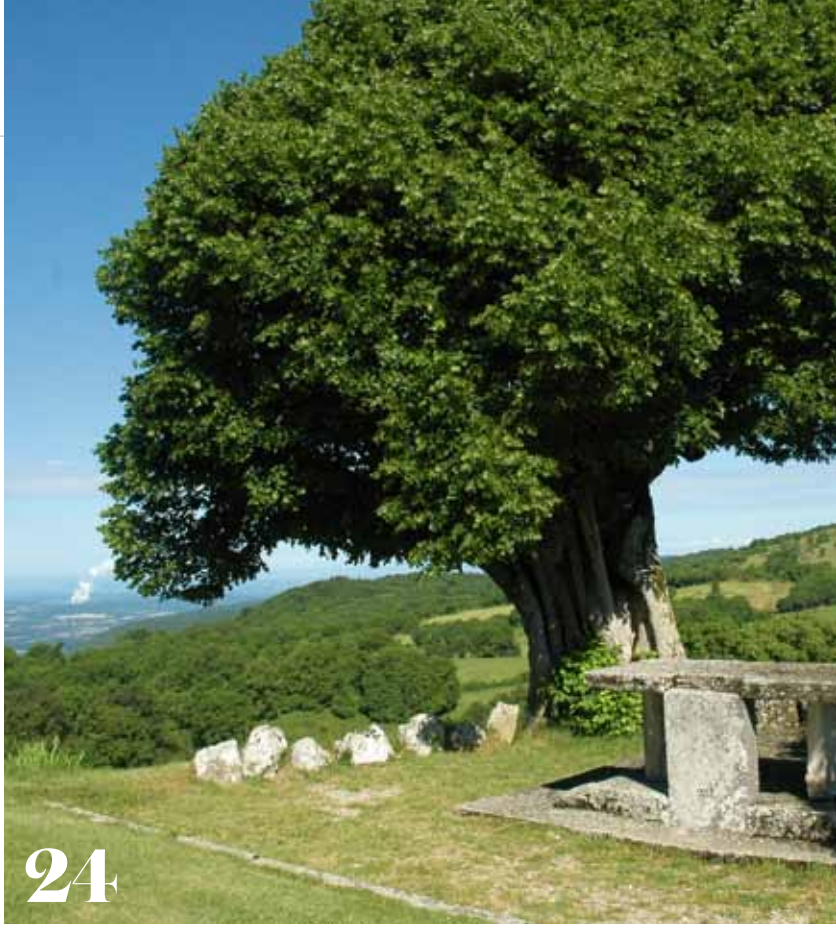

Editor's note

There are changes afoot at *Living Woods* magazine, as you'll see in the Letter from the Publisher (p 3). For the full-on winter woodland management season, we share the Woodland Skills Centre's plans (p14), figure out what those trees are (p12), rate two new chainsaws (p 28 and p 32), sharpen our hand tools (p 30), get serious about chainsaw safety (p 34) and construct a really useful woodland first aid kit (p 36). As always, let us know what you think.

Nancy Wood Editor
nancy@livingwoodsmagazine.co.uk

COVER: Sweet chestnuts by Greteli Morton, a winner of the 2017 Woodlands Awards in the Best Woodland Photography category (p 18).

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WOODLANDS AWARDS
WINNER 2017

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CHANGE AHEAD

DEAR READER,

Many thanks for your support of *Living Woods Magazine* over the last two years – and more, in many cases.

Our editor, Nancy Wood, has produced the magazine for two years and in our opinion has created a truly valuable resource on woodland activities and woodland management, with articles and photos that we have all really appreciated. PDFs of back copies can be seen here: http://www.woodlands.co.uk/living-woods-magazine/

Woodlands.co.uk has been willing to subsidise the losses of the magazine in order to encourage wider woodland ownership and enjoyment. However, the rising costs of printing and distribution and the other costs of a physical production – at a time when paid subscriptions have been falling – have increased the losses that each new edition makes. In addition, the widespread move towards online information has torpedoed the economics of printed magazines.

In order to keep the publication going and to support woodland owners and enthusiasts, we have therefore decided to publish the magazine online only and merge it with the *Small Woodland Owners Group Newsletter.* From the beginning of 2018 the two publications will be merged online and all existing subscribers will be emailed the online magazine. Please be sure we have your email address. You will, of course, be freely subscribed to the online magazine and we hope that you will feel able to waive any question of compensation for not getting further printed copies. If, on the other hand, you feel you should be repaid some of your subscription, please email me, angus@woodlands.co.uk, with your bank account details, information on how many future issues you are due and we will, of course, refund you.

As you may know, woodlands.co.uk also does a great deal to support woodlands owners and those who care for Britain's woods. We produce regular films on WoodlandsTV and we have a very active blog, which now has more than 900 blog posts. You'll find them on the woodlands.co.uk website along with free downloadable woodland posters and lesson plans for use in the classroom, tree and wildflower identification guides, recommendations for woodland courses, links to useful organisations and detailed reports we've commissioned. We support new owners to manage their woods by paying for them to go on practical courses, by joining them up to relevant organisations and by introducing them to nearby owners and to contractors. Beyond that, woodlands.co.uk contributes to the wider woodland world through our sponsorship of the Small Woods Association and our organising of the annual Woodlands Awards.

In our struggle against the challenging economics of producing a print publication, thank you again for giving *Living Woods Magazine* your support.

Yours sincerely,

Angus Hanton
Publisher of *Living Woods Magazine*
angus@woodlands.co.uk

> ***In order to keep Living Woods going and to support woodland owners and enthusiasts, we have decided to publish the magazine online only from the beginning of 2018.***

@Woodland News

GROW YOUR OWN?
A first: a Périgord black truffle has been successfully cultivated in the UK, in a secret location in Monmouthshire. Researchers from the University of Cambridge and Mycorrhizal Systems Ltd (MSL) inoculated a Mediterranean oak with truffle spores before planting and treated the surrounding soil for acidity. Nine years later, the truffle was harvested by a specially trained dog, Bella. Black truffles sell for up to £1,700 per kg. For more information: plantationsystems.com

CARIBBEAN DISASTER RELIEF
Immediately following devastating Caribbean hurricanes this autumn, DART International UK, the Disaster Arborists Rescue Team, deployed teams and equipment to the island country of Dominica, 90% destroyed by the winds. DART responders are professionally qualified arborists who bring a wealth of additional skills. As volunteer Jenny Long says, 'The situation in the Caribbean is exactly what we are trained to deal with.' During a month-long presence on the island, the team trained the 17-member Dominican Fire Department in chainsaw and clearance techniques, leaving equipment donated by Makita UK and Fletcher Stewart Stein. Hats off to sponsors and volunteers. dartinternational.co.uk

TWO ARBOR APPS
Treezilla.org is using citizen scientists to map every tree in Britain and certainly would appreciate your help. The website tells all. Forest Seedlings is a field guide to the identification of tree and shrub seedlings in their first year of growth. From the Forestry Commission, available at the App Store and Google Play.

10% gain in urban tree canopy means 12% decrease in crime.

LEARN MORE FOR LESS
Plumpton College is offering SWOG members a 25% discount on their extremely useful short courses through May 2018. Of particular interest for woodland owners: Woodland Archaeology, Woodland Tree Identification, Introduction to Woodland Management and Applying for Felling Licenses. www.swog.org.uk//newsletters.

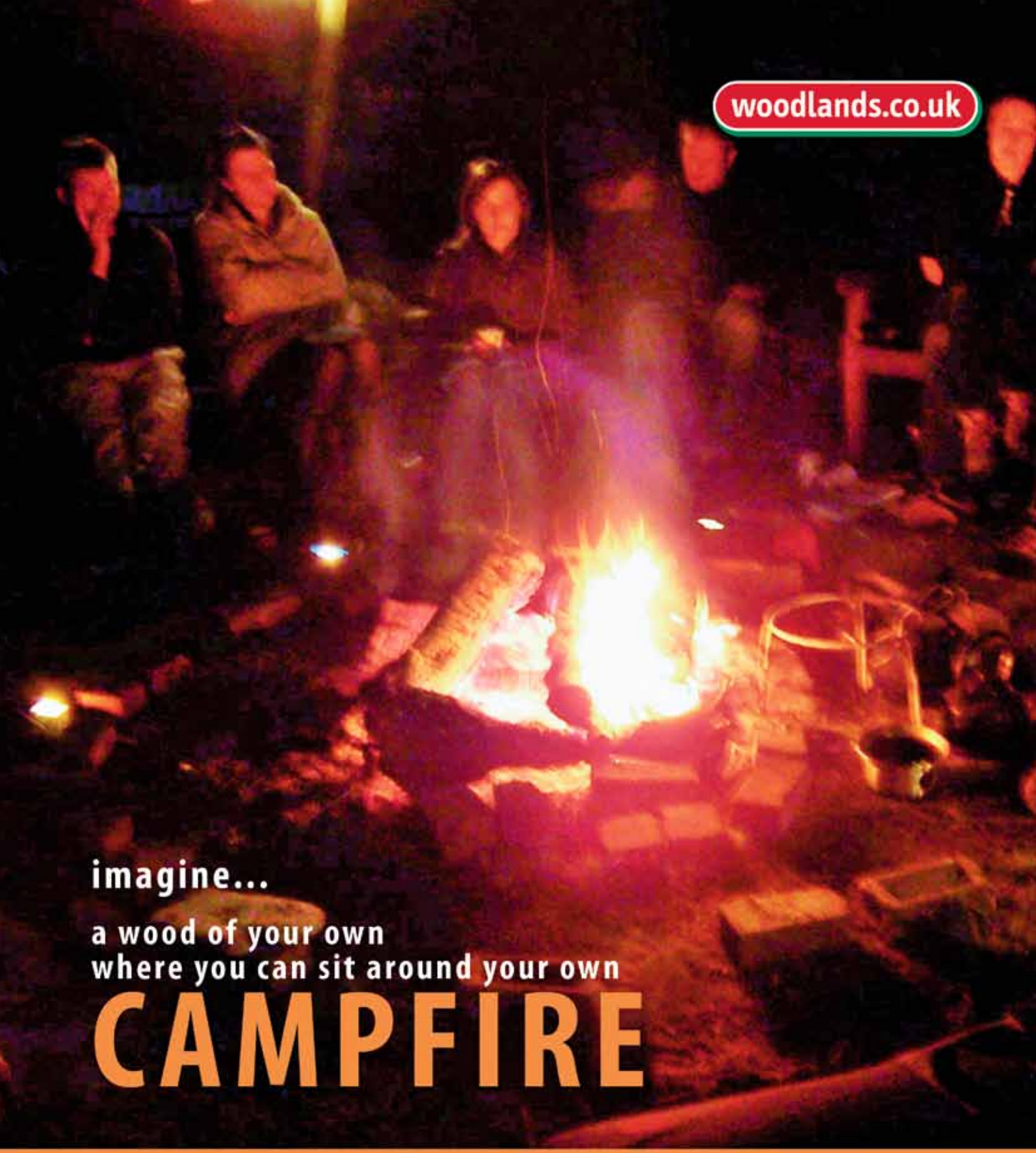
RAPID AGEING
Ambitious charity Back from the Brink plans to prematurely age selected oaks in Windsor Great Park in order to bridge the 'age gap' and provide continuity between younger oaks and the unique habitat that veteran trees provide for the many species that depend on them. Tree experts will 'veteranise' selected mature trees using everything from fungus to pigeon droppings. naturebftb.co.uk

TREE CHARTER LAUNCH

In 1217, 800 years ago, the Forest Charter restored the rights of freemen to use forests for firewood and grazing. The 2017 *Charter for Trees, Woods and People* launched on 6 November at Lincoln, the product of more than 70 organisations working for two years under the leadership of the Woodland Trust, putting protection for trees and woodlands at the heart of government policy and marking the role that trees play in all our lives. To celebrate, 11 charter poles will be installed around the UK. Add your name: treecharter.uk.

JUDITH MILLIDGE

Charter Pole at Lincoln Castle



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a wood of your own
where you can sit around your own

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Only Connect

Garland Wood links **Julia Goodfellow-Smith** to root and sky, people and history

JULIA GOODFELLOW-SMITH

We can see that trees are connected above ground, physically supporting each other. Reading *The Hidden Life of Trees* by Peter Wohlleben has also made me aware of trees' underground connections. Fungi share nutrients and water with and between trees. I now see the wide variety of mushrooms and fungi in the woodland as an integral part of its ecosystem, connecting the trees and making them stronger. My ideas on how to manage Garland Wood are evolving as I contemplate these connections.

Woodland connections extend beyond the trees and fungi. For me, they extend across centuries. When I'm in the wood, I feel a deep connection to past generations. People have sheltered in these woods, worked them for timber and warmed themselves by fires for thousands of years. We are continuing a rich tradition.

Owning Garland Wood has helped us to strengthen our connections with friends and family too. Now we have a camp set up with shelter, toilet and fire pit, friends and family find excuses to visit. One friend came to 'forest bathe', and instead helped us finish our shelter. Two of our best friends are now affectionately known as 'Slasher' and 'Snedder' after showing a surprising degree of skill and enthusiasm for those activities. Our woodland neighbours have dropped in for cups of tea and our families have visited for lunch.

Over the last few months, we have made connections with foresters in the UK and Sweden. Our Swedish friend's father speaks no English, but our love of trees connected us as he showed us his woodland. He and his neighbours act as a co-operative, with a shared management plan – a model we're talking to our woodland neighbours about following. On a Royal Forestry Society training course (paid for from our woodlands.co.uk training allowance), I connected with professional foresters who were all willing to share their knowledge with an enthusiastic amateur. Our Royal Forestry Society mentor and his wife are fast becoming friends, thanks to our shared interests.

JULIA GOODFELLOW-SMITH

> ***Woodland creates a web of connections, some more obvious than others.***

JULIA GOODFELLOW-SMITH

I also feel a deep connection to the trees themselves, to the landscape and to the seasons. After the colourful spring and shady summer, the days are darkening but the view through the trees is getting lighter. Garland Wood is bright with the colours of autumn. The ground of the mixed woodland is carpeted with the greens, yellows and browns of fallen leaves. Mottled sunlight is reaching the floor of the beech woods for the first time in months, giving the whole area a russet glow. The fallen leaves crunch underfoot, evoking memories of childhood and connecting me to my own past.

When we bought Garland Wood, I thought we were just buying some land and trees that we could enjoy and protect. I had no idea that we would get so much more in terms of connections – to the past, the rest of the ecosystem and our own support network of family and friends.

www.questforfuturesolutions.co.uk

Turning Point

Will St Clair wants to widen the impact of green woodworking

Yoav Elkayam and Will St Clair

As I sit writing this at the big, round oak table in the kitchen of the woodland workshop, it's an August weekend. The latest batch of bowl turners are spinning away on their second bowls and getting ready to pack up their lathes to take home. This course marks 16 new lathes and bowl turners since Yoav Elkayam and I started the course last year. I take great pleasure in the thought of them still turning and pushing their green woodwork journey further. I feel this course marks a higher level of commitment than making a chair or a stool, and, in many cases, learning to carve spoons. A lathe is something that will function for more than a lifetime, if looked after. It is a tool to make things rather than just an item to adorn your home. It demands a journey.

When I meet people on the course I try to gauge whether they are starting a new hobby or beginning (or adding to) a new way of life. My greatest hope is that these lathes will help people to make a living or add to their income and that more folk will begin to see wood culture as a perfectly viable way of life and not something that is 'alternative'. It is great to see so many young people on this course and that most of them seem to be at the point of taking the craft seriously as a part of their lives.

One of our most recent participants travelled from Sweden to learn about traditional bowl turning. He makes his living restoring old Swedish timber buildings and is passionate about craft. He lives in an area that has a long history of bowl turning, but no one today (other than him!) turns bowls on a foot-powered lathe. I love the fact that, in our little wood in Herefordshire, we may have planted the seed that will revive an almost dead tradition in an area of Sweden.

I look forward to seeing how this seed grows, and if our friend is able to inspire others in his town and beyond. But I wonder which people will take up this craft? Our bowl turning courses are almost exclusively filled with white middle class men. There are more women on other courses, but again, mostly middle class and white. Is craft seen as a luxury? Do we need the luxury of some kind of socio-economic security before we feel able to retreat from the world of offices and economic growth to live a more humble life doing handcraft to make a living?

> ***Our bowl turning courses are almost exclusively filled with white middle class men.***

WILL ST CLAIR

More and more people are selling their work online and the standard is getting higher and higher, but as the standard improves, in many cases, so does the price. With well-known names shining through who sell small amounts of their work for high prices, will people start to see the craft as an elite, artistic pursuit? In many cases, the skill and time that has gone into the work warrants the price, but in many other cases people seem adept at marketing themselves online and are able to set any price they like. As with designer clothes, people often pay for the name before worrying about the quality or functionality of the work.

I sincerely hope that people from all backgrounds will continue to look upon self-employed craft as a job that can bring success. But do we first need to break the myth that success is only achieved by constant economic growth? Maybe then more people would seek success in the hundreds of unmanaged woodlands across the UK than by climbing the corporate ladder.

willstclair.co.uk

WINTER TIME

For more than twenty years, woodsman, author and eco-builder **Ben Law** has lived and worked at Prickly Nut Wood in the roundwood timber-framed home he created, closely attuned to the rhythms of the year.

BEN LAW

Winter is the beginning of the woodland year and much of the winter is spent coppicing and preparing timber for summer projects. Occasional outings into the local community to deliver logs, lay a hedge or erect a fence occur, but it is a time of hard physical work (which keeps you warm) in the woodland.

Bird song is fairly quiet save the tawny and little owls, especially around the full moon, and the occasional woodcock can be heard at dusk.

The apprentices begin in winter each year, arrive with a jolt into the long dark nights and have a fast learning curve to adapt to simple living. This is a lifestyle choice and, once taken, it is unlikely they will want to return to a life away from the woods.

Wild food is in short supply, save grey squirrels (grey squirrels cause severe damage to trees, if the numbers are not controlled), which are easier to see with the leaf gone from the trees.

Snow brings relief as magic descends upon the woodscape. This is the time for tracking, the deer are easy to follow and the coppice is too covered up to work – time for the sledge!

www.ben-law.co.uk

Bare Buds TREE ID

Dominic Price has a reliable method of wintertime tree identification

Winter trees bridge the gap between the mellow fruitfulness of autumn and the rebirth of nature in the spring. They are reminiscent of bleak landscapes, windblown and lying in dormancy to such a degree that they can appear dead. Yet closer inspection reveals a different story: a multitude of slowly swelling buds, often visible in August before the tree has even thought about losing its leaves. These represent thousands of tiny bundles of life waiting to spring forth with leaf upon leaf, giving a glimpse of hope in the depth of winter.

Buds are complex structures. Inside each one, small inner leaves wait, pleated and folded, containing a large surface area in a tiny space. The protective outer leaves, or bud scales, tend to be tougher and more darkly coloured to protect the inner leaves. In spring, the buds elongate, the bud scales curl back and drop off, and the inner leaves rapidly unfold and extend their surface so that the tree can begin to benefit from the process of photosynthesis well before the new season's growth of leaves is produced.

When identifying trees in the growing season, leaves and fruits are the most obvious cues. In winter, there are four characteristics generally to consider: shape of the tree, bark, twig structure and buds. If there is an adequate fall of leaves or fruit remaining beneath the tree, it can add another element to your identification process, but I find that buds are key to winter tree identification. Indeed, I organised my book, *Winter Trees: A photographic guide to common trees and shrubs*, so that it opens with a collection of photographs of buds at the front of the book, meaning you can literally hold your twig against each photo until you get a match. At this point you can dive into the more detailed species accounts.

SPECIES RECOVERY TRUST

Beech

SPECIES RECOVERY TRUST

Hornbeam bud

Trees in the UK are neatly divided into those with opposite buds and those with alternate or spiralling buds. With only roughly 40 common native trees, this immediately splits them down into a very manageable number. Once you've observed this arrangement, you'll start noticing the different shapes of buds, from the pointy wands of beech to the shiny red plump tips of lime and so on. Some buds, such as ash and horse chestnut are huge, and can be spotted way up in the tree canopy, whereas others like elm and birch need close examination.

The trees whose buds are paired include ash, elder, sycamore, horse chestnut and buckthorn. Alternating or spiralling buds appear on some of our commonest trees: alder, beech, birch, elm, grey willow, hawthorn, hazel, hornbeam, sweet chestnut, lime and oak.

Some species can be harder to identify in the winter and at first sight appear very similar, like, beech and hornbeam. Beech has longer and pointier buds, while hornbeam twigs are thinner and more delicate, lying closer to the stem than beech buds. Silver birch and downy birch can easily cause confusion. The twigs of the downy birch are hairy with few warts and are darker and duller than silver birch, which has hairless, warty twigs that can appear quite shiny.

The usefulness of tree identification during winter woodland management season is clear. Even on the greyest of winter days, trees still offer everything necessary for confident, correct identification. Grab a guide or load an app and get into the woods.

To purchase the book, go to www.field-studies-council.org and search 'Dominic Price' or look under AIDGAP Guides.

Dominic Price is director of the Species Recovery Trust and author of Winter Trees: A photographic guide to common trees and shrubs, published by the Field Studies Council. www.speciesrecoverytrust.org.uk

SPECIES RECOVERY TRUST

Time of RENEWAL

Rod Waterfield of the Woodland Skills Centre has practical, creative plans for the woodland management season

When people who visit our woodland say how lovely it is, I know they are seeing how the paths wind through the wood, the variety of tree species, the flora, the wildlife and the distant views of the hills. As the leaves come off the trees and our 45-acre woodland settles down for the winter, all I see is a list of what needs to be done before spring!

Paths

Some of the most heavily used paths in our network of around 2km of paths have become rutted and there is a stump sticking up at the edge of the path we most use, which must be taking a toll on vehicle tyres. This winter we will remove the stump and fill in the potholes. Rather than removing the stump complete, we will dig away the soil round it and use a chainsaw with an old chain and bar – we keep some for this purpose.

We have permissive public access throughout the woodland and people are very good at keeping to the paths, which we encourage in two ways. We mow all the paths twice a year with a tractor with a rotary mower deck, leaving the edges a tangle of brambles. Where there are no brambles, we make dead hedges with the brash from the trees we fell. This winter we will look at the state of these dead hedges and rebuild them where necessary. Not only do the dead hedges encourage people to keep to the paths, we avoid having a tangle of brash in working areas and instead provide shelter for birds and small mammals and a habitat for insects at the bottom of the food chain.

Recent plantings

When we bought the 40-year-old woodland it was self-sown and sycamore-dominated growing on what had been rough grazing. We planned to take a section of the wood each year, do a heavy fell, leaving the ash, oak and the best of the rest, plant with a variety of native hardwoods and establish a coppice with standards woodland.

We didn't realise how vigorous the bramble and bracken growth would be in the cleared areas. The bramble just makes it difficult to get near newly-planted trees to see how they are doing. The bracken presents a different problem. In our wood it grows to over two metres tall during the summer. When it dies and falls down in the autumn, it bends all the new-planted trees down. They either die, get eaten by rabbits, or slugs remove the bark.

We had tried strimming the brambles and bracken, but it was difficult to avoid cutting the planted young trees and destroying any natural regeneration. Using glyphosate would have harmed the ground flora. We decided to go back into the areas one at a time and cut out the brambles and then, in the spring and early summer, cut the bracken before it overtops the new plantings. So this winter we will concentrate on two of the areas, hand cutting down the brambles, working through the dead bracken, seeing if any of the new plantings have survived and replacing those that have failed. After that we MUST ensure that we keep the new plantings clear of brambles and bracken.

Ponds

Our woodland is on sandy soil and so there are no streams or other surface water. We made a pond some seven years ago and within two years it had frogs, toads, smooth, palmate and great-crested newts, many species of dragonflies and damselflies and a range of other aquatic creatures. The pond gradually became overgrown with reed mace and we were concerned that, in removing most of that, we would harm the pond creatures attached to the stems.

The advice we received was simple: make another pond and work on each in alternate years. So we made two extra ponds. This winter

Rod Waterfield teaching at the Woodland Skills Centre

One of our three ponds

we will work on one of them removing most of the reed mace and other plants, dredging out some of the silt and strimming back all the surrounding vegetation. This will harm some of the pondlife, but will create a better environment ready to be recolonised from the other ponds.

Unwanted plants

We are free of most of the unwelcome plants such as rhododendron, snowberry and garden escapees, but we do have a problem with laurel. We have always had a small and well-established thicket of laurel but recently a significant number of laurel seedlings appeared. A few years ago we had a most successful campaign to deal with this.

A team of students and staff from our nearest special school came out and combed the woodlands, digging up young laurel trees. We gave them pots and compost and they potted up the plants and sold them at their school's Christmas Fair to people who wanted a laurel hedge in their garden – a great project for the children, learning some woodland management, getting fresh air and exercise, raising funds for their school and clearing unwanted plants from our woods. We will do something similar this winter.

Safety checks

It is much easier to check the trees in the winter. We leave a lot of cut timber on the ground, especially birch, which is of little value as firewood or for craftwork and rots down quickly. Standing dead trees are a valuable habitat and we leave these where they are, well clear of paths. Any dead trees or trees with dead wood in the canopy which are near to paths need to be inspected and dealt with. We have an agreement with a local woodland management company that, in exchange for taking a sustainable firewood harvest of around 30 tonnes a year, carries out the work we can't do such as the harvesting, maintenance of the paths and safety work.

One of the joys of looking after a woodland is that most jobs can be put off for a year or two. The danger of this is that they keep being put off and the woodland suffers. You have to have a management plan – what you want the woodland to be like in 25, 50 and 100 years – and then work towards it. A sympathetically managed wood is a delight with a good range of tree species and ages, clearings and paths, varied flora, full of wildlife, enjoyed by all who visit, and paying its way.

www.woodlandskillscentre.uk

SHINRIN-YOKU: FINDING MYSELF IN THE WOODS

Social Forester and teacher **Nick Hulley** learns to add Woodland Mindfulness to his teaching and his life

Walking slowly, stealthily, without words along the woodland trails, drawing in the smells, sounds and feelings offered up by the forest as the Tibetan tingsha bells sounded, I found myself centred in the moment, experiencing new mindfulness, beginning to understand Japanese Shinrin-yoku or 'forest bathing' for the first time.

Last June I took part in an OCN Level 3 course at the Woodland Skills Centre in Bodfari called 'Mindfulness in Woodland Settings'. I teach woodland activities to all ages, and my intention was to learn to offer a more inclusive, holistic approach to my woodland programmes, especially for young adults struggling with the stress and pressures of the modern day world. I hoped to be able to pass on a tool kit of coping strategies. The course, led by Julia and Gareth, covered the benefits, principles and practice of mindfulness and its uses to lessen stress and to enhance wellbeing. Incorporating a few classroom elements, the course mostly took place outside.

It was late June. As we participants gathered and began chatting away, I knew that I was going to enjoy my time among the group. A true communal spirit developed as we worked and cooked together. We engaged in hands-on examples of future sessions we may wish to lead, to expand or to adapt according to our own needs. As the days unfolded, I began to feel really comfortable with the course, and I recall projecting at times into my own patterns of delivery and thinking, 'Yep, that'd work so well here, there, with this group or that.'

We spent time carrying out conservation work, thinning out, understanding the intricacies of woodland management and collecting resources, but with regular time for pausing, centering and mindfully being in the now. We were invited to participate in meditation sessions. That was a first for me, but what an introduction, and one I've continued. Other hours were spent developing green woodworking skills using shave horses and pole lathes. We were encouraged to create our own activities combining mindfulness with woodland settings where we gave and received feedback from the other participants who were now friends. With my background, I was called upon to provide input on forestry skills. Others proffered mindfulness insights.

It was deep in a forest glade that I most greatly felt the therapeutic effects of mindfulness in the forest setting, the Japanese Shinrin-yoku (a taking in of the forest atmosphere or 'forest bathing'). Our resident former Buddhist monk began to discuss the natural and religious history of mindfulness/meditation. At some point, among readings from George Monbiot's *Feral: Rewilding the land, the Sea and Human Life,* Vedic and Yogic traditions and Jon Kabat-Zinn's early Burmese and Thai meditations, my awareness grew that I was being enriched by the forest. Its scents, the heat of the sun, the breeze, the birdsong and now, in effect, I myself became totally absorbed in the whole environment unfolding in front of me – it was working for me!

Five months on, I find myself weaving many aspects of the mindfulness course into my teaching sessions, including mandala woodland art creativity during Forest School activities, bushcraft programmes with teenagers leaving care or pure woodland mindfulness courses. It's also an invaluable tool for me and has become second nature, embedded in all aspects of my day. In fact my favourite time is my woodland site sweep preamble around the forest.

This is how it goes for me. Upon entering the woodland, a calmness descends. In fact,

Nick Hulley in his element

Nick Hulley is a Social Forester working in woodlands throughout Staffordshire delivering Mindfulness, Bushcraft, Forest School and green woodworking sessions. Find him on facebook.com/in2thewildwood or instagram.com/in2thewildwood

NICK HULLEY

Tibetan tingsha bells are now part of the toolkit

the simple act of unlocking the padlock and pushing the gate forth does it for me. My first port of call visually is the walk, involving a scanning of the layout. The first sensation is the temperature change. In summer, it is cooler and winter it is warmer – a specific sense is triggered here. As I move about the trails, on my checks, I can search through the trees from the rides with ease. I feel the slight breeze fluctuations. I'm overwhelmed, especially on warmer days, by the smells released not just by the leaves, the barks or the flowering plants in general, but by the dank soils, the must of fox and badger or the decomposing trunks. My hearing is overrun by the multitude of differing birdsong, then is pierced suddenly by the mewing of a buzzard as she glides above me, the distant bark of a female *Dama dama* or the rustle in the undergrowth prior to the stoat's emergence to shoot the pathway. My senses are alert as I'm bombarded with new and familiar information. After my 'rounds', I ease into the fire circle glade. I lower my rucksack, remove the kindling I've brought along with the tinder, heft the axe into a couple of logs, light the fire and boil the kettle – wood smoke, tea, crackling billets, fresh cut logs, the firelight flicker, the outer focus stillness and yet the inner calmness continues to enrich my wellbeing. I ground myself, cross-legged and centred. The following fifteen minutes of the breath, the inner sight, the acknowledgement and the continued return to the breath sets me up for the day. This marriage works, forest environments and mindfulness, even if it is just a short 'centre and pause' while doing.

Much research to establish positive links between woodlands and improved health is available. It is a wider work in progress; most of the studies are specific, limited in their sampling and from differing cultural mindsets to our own in the UK, but as a scientific groundwork collective, it is a soil worth cultivating in earnest.

For more info:
Forestry Commission: www.forestry.gov.uk/autumn-mindfulness

New research from Essex Wildlife Trust and the University of Essex: http://www.essexwt.org.uk/news/2017/10/06/green-minds-think-alike

Woodland Skills Centre: woodlandskillscentre.uk

The Winners

Congratulations to all the 49 winners of this, the first in a new series of Woodlands Awards, and thanks to woodlands.co.uk for their creation of the awards. We're delighted that so many of the winners previously appeared in *Living Woods*.

WOODLAND BLOGS

Susan Davis and Sarah Axon for oldcopse.blogspot.co.uk
Joanne Hedger for raiswood.blogspot.co.uk
Alan Waterman for catbrookwood.wordpress.com

SMALL WOODLAND WEBSITES

Alan Morton for www.sallertonwood.org.uk
Jo Kjaer for www.jokjaer.com

WOODLAND BUILDINGS/SHELTER

Susan Davis and Sarah Axon at Old Copse, Sussex
Anna and Pete Grugeon, Off-Grid Cabin at Bulworthy Project
John and Leigh Price for moduLog

WOODLAND TOOL RECOMMENDATIONS

The Silky F180 Folding Saw
Stallion Pole Saws by CEuk
The Stihl Cordless Electric Chainsaw MSA160

WHOLE WOOD OWNERS' COORDINATORS

Alexander Bienfait
Richard Cooper
Mark Herbert
John Jackson
John Richards

WOODLAND CONTRACTORS

Dartmoor Horse Loggers
South Devon. www.dartmoorhorseloggers.co.uk
Meirion Davies, Agricultural Contactor and Plant Hire
Llwynbedw, Ceredigion
Nina Williams and Andy Wright at English Woodlands Forestry, Cocking, West Sussex.
www.englishwoodlandsforestry.co.uk

FOREST SCHOOLS

Lea Primary Forest School
Holloway, Matlock, Derbyshire.
www.lea-pri.derbyshire.sch.uk/forest-schools.html

WOODLAND COURSES

Go Wild Forest School Training
Go Wild Education, Brockweir, Gwent.
www.gowildeducation.co.uk/training
Greenwood Days
Ferrers Centre for Arts & Crafts, Staunton Harold, Leicestershire.
www.greenwooddays.co.uk
Malvern Coppicing
Malvern, Worcestershire.
www.malverncoppicing.co.uk
Sustainable Woodland Management at the Centre for Alternative Technology
Machynlleth, Powys . courses.cat.org.uk/woodland-and-crafts/sustainable-woodland-management-detail

COMMUNITY WOODS

Kilfinan Community Forest
Tighnabruaich, Argyll. www.kilfinancommunityforest.co.uk
Skelton Woods Environment Group
Whinmoor, Leeds, West Yorkshire.
en-gb.facebook.com/swegvols
Warren Woods
Denbigh. woodlandskillscentre.uk

WOODLAND TRADE STANDS

Matt Belfrage
Templecombe, Somerset.
www.mattbelfrage.co.uk
Christchurch Society of Woodturners
Christchurch, Dorset.
www.christchurchwoodturners.org.uk
The Creative Chestnut Company
Yarley, Somerset.
www.TheCreativeChestnutCompany.co.uk
Woodland Skills Centre
Bodfari, Denbigh. woodlandskillscentre.uk

WOODLAND BOOKS OF THE YEAR

Strange Labyrinth: Outlaws, poets, mystics, murderers and a coward in London's great forest
by Will Ashon (Granta)
Spon: A guide to spoon carving and the new wood culture
by Barn the Spoon (Virgin Books)
Down to the River and Up to the Trees: Discover the nature on your doorstep
by Sue Belfrage (Thorsons)
Arboreal: A collection of new woodland writing
ed. Adrian Cooper (Little Toller Books)

The West Yorkshire Woods: Part 1 The Calder Valley:
by Christopher Goddard (self-published)
The Wood for the Trees: The long view of nature from a small wood
by Richard Fortey (William Collins)
The Green Wood Companion
by Barry Mays (eco-logic books)
A Tale of Trees: The battle to save Britain's ancient woodland
by Derek Niemann (Short Books)

REGIONAL & NATIONAL WOODLAND ORGANISATIONS

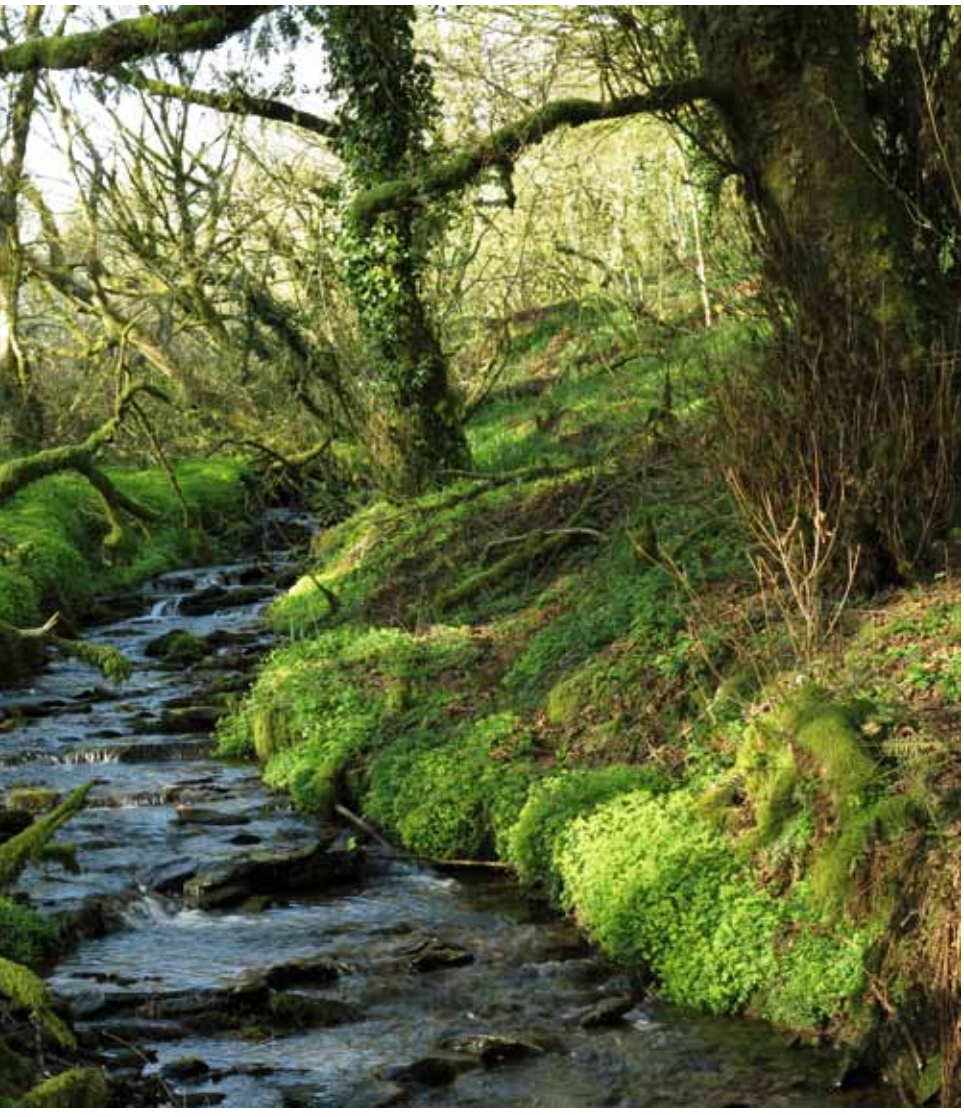
The Conservation Volunteers
www.tcv.org.uk
The National Coppice Federation
ncfed.org.uk
The Royal Forestry Society
www.rfs.org.uk
Sylva Foundation
www.sylva.org.uk

WOODLAND PHOTOGRAPHY

Karen Elliott
Frances Lee
Greteli Morton
Graham Strong

For much more detail and more photographs, see the woodlands.co.uk website under 'Resources'.


KAREN ELLIOTT


GRAHAM STRONG


GRETELI MORTON


GRETELI MORTON

THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

Alex Walshaw took a winding path to become a green woodworker. He met a guide, friend or mentor at every turning.

My journey started when I was 17,' says artist and green woodworker Alex Walshaw, 'I had left my home in Lincolnshire and found myself staying in South Wales in an old farmhouse near Whitchurch with a group of British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV, now The Conservation Volunteers or TCV). We went out every day volunteering, doing pond digging or tree planting. It was a super time. While I was there, I saw a guy doing pole lathing – the first time I'd ever seen it.'

Walshaw spent more time hitchhiking across Wales, volunteering for the BTCV, at one point sleeping on their office floor in the north. In 1995, when he was hitching a ride to a meeting against a proposed road-building project on Anglesey, he met the award-winning chairmaker Hugh Roberts. Alex says the meeting was life changing, if low-key.

'Hugh said, 'I'm a green woodworker,' and I said, 'Wow.'' Alex relates. 'It turned out that we both loved reggae music. He said, 'Come along and check it out.' He was working then at Aber Falls, coppicing and making charcoal. I did come along that winter and was just transfixed by the whole scene, the wood burner, the pole lathe. I had a little go and that was supposed

PHOTOGRAPHS BY STUDIO 2M

to be that, but Hugh said, 'Come back and you can build your own pole lathe and shave horse, then go off and do your own thing.' So I did come back and I did build my own pole lathe and shave horse, but it turned into a proper apprenticeship of more than two years. I was living on Anglesey in a yurt I'd built and I biked to Hugh's every day. We did shows, coppicing, taught courses. Eventually I moved my yurt to his garden and lived there for some time.'

Seeing the fineness and expertise of Alex's work now, it is easy to assume he had a natural gift for wood.

'I couldn't even saw straight or hit in a nail when I started with Hugh,' Alex laughs. 'It's just that it is a passion. I wanted to do it, had a real hunger for it, so I practised and did it again and again. That's how you learn. And I loved being in the workshop: the feel of it, the sound of it, the gentle nature of it.'

After his time with Hugh, Alex travelled the country working with different makers, including a boat builder – 'If I were to build a boat now, it would sink!' He also studied yurt making with Hal Wynne-Jones, the man who first brought yurts and yurt making to Britain in the 1990s.

'I lived in a crow's nest in his barn for a year,' says Alex with undeniable wistfulness. 'I look back with very fond memories on those days. It was a time of freedom and exploring and meeting people. We went to festivals. We went to Glastonbury to demonstrate green woodworking there.'

Later, he also spent time at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, working with cabinetmakers to build sets. These days he lives a settled life – as much as life can be settled with three young children – on the edge of the Black Country with his partner, a silkscreen print artist. Alex sells his beautiful, sculptural bowls and objects through three galleries.

'I don't want to say I developed my own style, more my own groove,' he says. 'I'm inspired by artists like Barbara Hepworth and David Nash, but really by the wood itself, its organic nature. I mainly use windfall and branches, most from our local nature reserve by the River Stour on the fringe of Birmingham, sometimes even whole trees. I take a little bit and leave loads. I go with the natural curves of the wood, 'going with the grain'. Recently I've been given some reclaimed oak from breakwaters, old oak posts from the sea. It's wonderful stuff, but very hard.'

Alex's life is busy, between his green woodworking and taking his children out into nature as frequently as possible. 'We go tree climbing and things like that. My main priority is connecting them with the earth.'

He may also be inadvertently passing on to them the attitude that informs his method of green woodworking.

'I get a piece of wood and just have a go with it, have a play. It's really important to have a playful nature. That's what keeps it fresh and exciting.'

To see more of Alex Walshaw's work and for gallery info: www.alexwalshaw.com

TALE OF A TRUE WOODSMAN

Mark Papworth celebrates the brief flowering of Croydon Charcoal and remembers a friend

Were he still alive, Rob Sowter would be writing this article, because Rob was a man who liked things done his way. But, sadly, the story of Croydon Charcoal has been left to me to tell.

I met Rob through the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV, now the The Conservation Volunteers) in 2006. He was a team leader with responsibility for woodland work and a tree nursery and I was a willing helper. Rob's enthusiasm for trees and woodland work knew few, if any, boundaries, and he was keen to expand the volume and diversity of work undertaken by the BTCV woodland team.

At times this was the source of some friction, so Rob decided to go it alone. I was inspired by his love of the woods and agreed to help him where I could. And with my vehicle and trailer, I was the ideal partner, as Rob didn't drive. His work ethic was second to none. I remember him complaining bitterly that he couldn't get out coppicing on Christmas Day because the local busses didn't run.

We mainly worked on land owned by the London Borough of Croydon, coppicing hazel and ash through the winter and making charcoal in the summer. For reasons only he could explain, Rob named the venture Croydon Charcoal (rather than the more accurate Croydon Coppice and Charcoal).
Croydon Charcoal had a philosophy:

- employ traditional hand coppicing techniques to establish a seven-year coppice cycle
- provide volunteering opportunities for people to learn woodland management skills and enjoy being in the woods
- discover if such activities could be commercially viable

Dead hedge and bluebells in spring woodland


Rob liked to be in the middle of things, as here in the kiln

WINTER

Each winter we produced 6 – 9,000 units of product from an area of 1 – 2 acres, primarily hedging binders and stakes, beanpoles, pea sticks, tree guards and other stakes. With an average charge of 50p per unit, this wasn't going to make anyone rich.

When it came to quality control, his standards were high. I often found what I thought to be a perfectly respectable pea stick on the brash pile, which we burnt or used for dead hedging. Our fires were a great joy on a winter's day, but also a bit of a liability. Because we weren't living on site and the land was publically owned, each day we damped down the fires and surrounded them with tiger tape as a warning to keep away.

At the end of the winter season we planted hundreds of hazel whips to build up the coppice density and supplemented planting by layering (staking to the ground with the underside scraped to encourage growth) hazel rods still connected to the coppice stool. Over the years we planted thousands of trees and improved the coppice cover.

SUMMER

The main summer activity was charcoal making. Our kiln was an eight-foot diameter steel construction with eight inlet/exhaust ports. A single burn took three days and the double burn five days. On a three-day camp, the middle day was generally quiet, with the kiln shut down and left to cool. With a five-day routine the kiln was emptied, reloaded, lit and so on.

As a charcoal kiln is quite a volatile thing during the charring process, someone had to attend to it 24 hours a day. This meant we camped out, generally in a fairly remote location, taking everything we needed with us. Our toilet was a rudimentary affair consisting of a hole in the ground and recycled loo seat and when privacy was needed we put up hessian sacking.

Typically half a dozen or more volunteers helped on site at the busiest times, chain sawing and splitting timber, loading the kiln and bagging up charcoal. Rob was headstrong. He always insisted on the charcoal kiln being loaded just so, and had a real tussle with the volunteers who were content to lob the timber in any old how.

At the quieter times it was often just Rob and me, or another of the hardier enthusiasts, enjoying the peace and quiet and natural beauty of the sites where we lodged. As the night time descended we liked to go out with bat detectors to identify the local species.

The kiln produced 60 - 80 3kg bags each burn, depending on the timber and burn conditions, and in a good season we might do eight to ten burns. But at £5 per bag the economics of charcoal making were not dissimilar to those of coppicing.

Our other income streams included brush cutting during summer months, deer fencing to protect the coppiced areas and a variety of odds and sods of woodland maintenance. Rob lived an extremely frugal existence, spending much of the Croydon Charcoal income on equipment and food for volunteers. He rarely talked about money and accounts, but I think he felt vindicated by his ability to earn an income from Croydon Charcoal. The use of hand tools and a volunteer workforce placed severe limitations on the commercial potential of the enterprise.

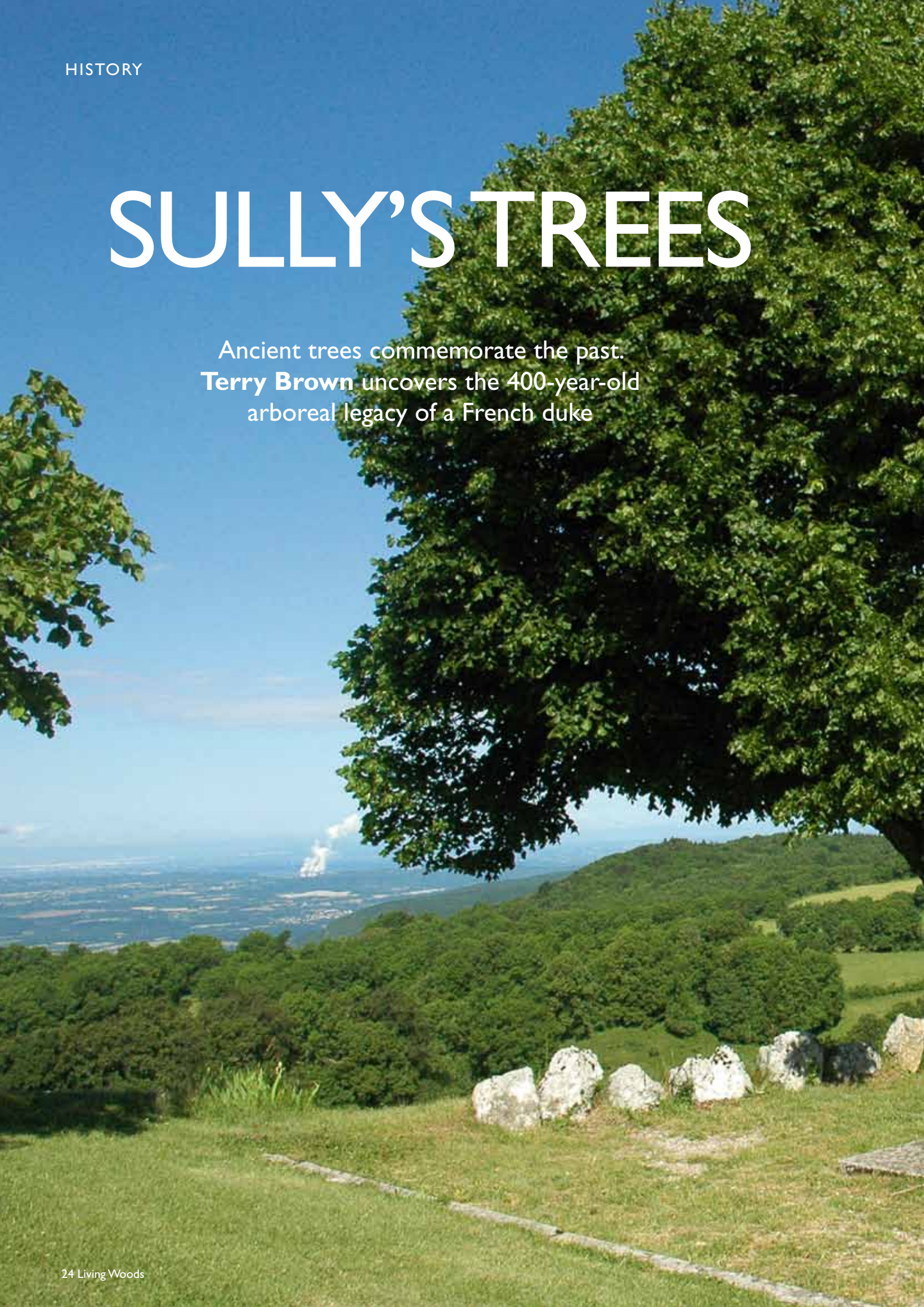
Croydon Charcoal was a rip roaring success in two ways: it gave a lot of people an insight into the life of a coppice worker and let them experience and enjoy the woods. The many acres of coppiced woodland in Croydon bear testament to all our hard work.

Early in 2013 Rob had emergency surgery, and for a short while he was out of commission. Together with a few other stalwarts, we managed to finish off the season and sell and deliver the coppice products. As soon as he was out of hospital, he began planning for the charcoal-making season, and we did complete a few burns. But as the treatment for Rob's illness progressed, his energy levels and physical capabilities wavered, and he found the rigours of outside work difficult to sustain.

Rob's treatment wasn't successful. He died in October 2014. Some of his friends erected a simple bench near his favourite coppicing site. It is engraved, 'Rob Sowter, a true woodsman'.

SULLY'S TREES

Ancient trees commemorate the past. **Terry Brown** uncovers the 400-year-old arboreal legacy of a French duke



At Innimond (Ain), this Sully tree is high up with wide-ranging views over the countryside

PHOTOGRAPH BY TERRY BROWN

It all began by chance. We came across a commemorative lime tree in Riverie, Rhône Department, in southeastern France. During the Wars of Religion (1562-98), this tiny Protestant village had been attacked by Catholics from nearby Lyon and all the men and boys in the village had been murdered. The tree was planted on the suggestion of the Duke of Sully (1560-1641), a statesman and trusted minister of Henri IV, as a symbol of reconciliation and hope for the future during France's rehabilitation following that war. Sadly, this tree has died and today only the stump remains.

At the time we thought this ancient tree was a one-off, but in subsequent years we discovered more such trees in our travels around France. A lime tree in St-Maurice-en-Valgaudemar (Hautes-Alpes), we were told, had been planted by Sully to celebrate the promulgation of the Edict of Nantes (1598). Another lime tree in St-Martin-en-Vercors (Drôme) was planted to celebrate the industrial success of the village, according to local tradition. In Olby (Puy-de-Dôme) is a tree planted to celebrate the passage of Henri IV through the village.

All this made me think that there might be many more Sully trees. But where should I look? Historians don't bother with trees; they are concerned with much more important matters. This is folk history, handed down orally from generation to generation. First, I looked through my collection of old travel books about France and found a few references to trees planted by Sully. Then I contacted people I knew in Sully-sur-Loire, which is twinned with Bradford on Avon, where we live, but found no information about the existence of such trees.

But the internet proved more helpful. I found

The Sully tree in Esse (Charente) is part of their war memorial.

The community at Bonnefond (Correze) really looks after this Sully lime with a concrete and boulder plinth to support a hollow trunk and metal ropes holding the branches together.

The rough wooden plaque nailed to the tree at Innimond (Ain) declares proudly 'I am a Sully'.

The Sully lime growing beside the church at Veilly (Cote d'Or) measures 10m in circumference

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TERRY BROWN

websites about interesting trees that included some planted by Sully and websites for individual villages that happen to have a Sully tree. Over the years we collected information and now have a list of 198 trees planted in villages by Sully, always by the church or, where there was no church, in the market place. We have visited about 70 of these.

More than 400 years old, the surviving trees are mostly limes, a tree symbolic of calm, peace, true love and justice. Lime trees were sacred in some early civilisations. It is obviously an appropriate tree to celebrate the promulgation of the Edict of Nantes, which ended (temporarily) the Religious Wars. Others, however, were elms, the tree of war; elm wood was used for gun carriages. The Duke was concerned about a possible shortage of such wood and ordered communities to plant elms. It is, I think, unlikely that these have anything to do with the Edict of Nantes and most of them have, of course, died.

We know that the Duke ordered forests to be replanted all over France and that he started the tradition of planting trees, especially poplars, alongside roads. But did he also order the planting of memorial trees in individual villages? He was careful with public money and trees make very cheap memorials. But memorials for what? Local traditions suggest different reasons for these trees including the passage of Henri through the village, industrial success, and the birth of Henri's heir as well as the celebration of the Edict of Nantes.

However, there is a theory that Sully ordered the planting of a lime tree in every community as a celebration of peace between religions and as a kind of secular village centre, an alternative meeting place instead of the church. The church, after all, had been the problem during the Religious Wars. This theory is supported by many local traditions. These trees have been used as meeting places, where markets were held, where community notices and legal judgments were announced, and as natural parasols for cafés. Several trees still shelter old stone benches. It is a confused picture. These trees deserve more research and more protection. This national heritage will not last forever.

www.sullystrees.weebly.com

DOLMAR PS 5105 CHAINSAW

Stuart Brooking is delighted to find a strong performer in a lesser-known brand

Having worked in woodlands and conservation management for nearly 20 years, I am more than aware that the chainsaw market has been dominated by two main brands jostling for top position. So when I had the opportunity to try a 'new' make, and actually received a Dolmar 5105 petrol chainsaw via courier, I delved into the box of tricks like an excited child on Christmas Day. Numerous chainsaw buffs had told me that Dolmar was one of the original makers of saws, and many of them were curious about the new Dolmar models. In fact, the Dolmar chainsaw celebrated its 90th anniversary this year. Emil Lerp developed the 'Type A' petrol-driven chainsaw in 1927, which weighed more than 50kg and required two men to operate. The Type A was tested on Mount Dolmar in the Thüringian Forest in Germany, hence the company name.

My local agent, Andrew Parkhouse, was very helpful and had sent me the Dolmar PS 5105 with a 15 inch bar and chain (the most useful as it can handle smaller jobs and is also good for felling all but the largest of trees). He also sent an 18-inch bar and chain and all the tools needed for maintenance.

My first impression was that the saw was a very manageable weight for its power. It looks well made, if not a tad more basic than other better-known brands of saw. This is not necessarily a bad thing as, similar to modern cars, some newer makes of saw are becoming harder to service by the owner because of the electronic plug-in required.

My first step was fuelling the saw. The fuel and oil caps were hard to undo by hand, so you would need the combi spanner tool to twist the caps using the flat head screwdriver.

Now, to start the saw. I flipped up the choke. It was easy to work out the level and it is sturdy enough for the constant use it will get. There is a lot of compression upon the first pull and the pull cord flipped back in and actually cut my finger!

Once I got to grips with the pull cord, it was fine, but may be tricky for some people to use. The saw started well and ticked over perfectly. The chain brake is sturdy and easy to use. I revved up the saw. It felt powerful and I could effortlessly control the speed of the chain with the trigger.

I used the saw for a couple of full days, performing both felling works and general clearance of rhododendron in the woodlands. The saw was a good weight to carry around all day and was fully reliable. The cutting quality was fine. I could use the saw without difficulty. It had plenty of power and chewed through everything in its way! As I was only able to give the Dolmar a short-term test, I am unable to speak for its longevity, but it does appear to be sturdy and it handled the rough ground conditions of the forest floor.

Taking the chain guard off to clean debris was very straightforward: two bolts to remove, as per most chainsaws. The inner guard and around the chain sprocket are simple to reach and clean with an old toothbrush. The adjustment screw for the chain worked very well.

Regarding spares, I spoke with a local business that specialises in woodland and garden equipment and who are very knowledgeable about chainsaws. When I mentioned the Dolmar brand, they said they would like to stock them as they are high quality saws, but that they are waiting for the after-sale service to become easier to manage. They find that, at present, it can take some time to get spares. For the woodland owner who uses a saw fairly infrequently, this may not be a problem. However, if you are a forester or if you rely on your saw for coppicing or regular firewood cutting, this may be an issue. Andrew, the local dealer who provided me with the Dolmar PS 5105 for testing, was very reassuring about the ease of getting spares and said that he keeps many parts in stock. He is the main contact in my area to deal with importing spares.

Overall, I enjoyed my time with the Dolmar saw and found it highly functional and ergonomically well designed. I would like to use the saw for a longer period of time to be able to properly compare it to the professional saws by Husqvarna and Stihl that I have used for the last 15 years. Local dealer Andrew told me that new models of Dolmar saws are coming soon, covering the 30 - 45cc end of the market and that they will be welcome competition for the small engine saws already on sale. He also mentioned that he is working with a large supplier of chainsaw supplies to market the Dolmar saws on a larger scale. There could be some exciting competition in the chainsaw market in 2018!

Stuart Brooking has a degree in Environmental Protection, teaches conservation to NVQ level and is active in conservation work and woodland management. He is the woodlands.co.uk agent for Devon.

Dolmar PS 5105, about £500 For more information: www.dolmar.com.

Thank you to Andrew Parkhouse of AJS Forest & Garden, Winkleigh, N Devon, who supplied the saw. Tel: 07817 356 819

SHARPEN UP

David Alty learns how to put a safer edge on his hand tools

When Jamie, from Cumbria Woodlands, asked me if I knew of anyone who might be interested in a sharpening course that they were hosting, I thought, 'That'll be me!' I have long wanted to improve my somewhat shocking sharpening skills.

The course was hosted by Low Bridge End Farm, set on the banks of St John's Beck in that most beautiful part of the Lake District, St John's in the Vale.

Sarah greeted us on arrival. She immediately offered refreshment in the form of tea and homemade biscuits, still warm from the oven, a delight that she repeated several times throughout the day.

Our instructor was Maurice Pyle, green woodworker and proprietor of Woodsmith Experience. He introduced us to the workshop, which he had already prepared with an impressive row of grinding wheels and belts, complemented by a bench laden with of a variety of stones and an array of tools awaiting our attention.

Following the usual round of names and backgrounds, we went straight into the first of the three stages of sharpening, **grinding**. Maurice ran through the pros and cons of hollow and flat (Scandi) grinds and discussed the advantages and disadvantages of the machinery he had brought along. He followed with a practical demonstration on the Tormek wet stone wheel and the Sorby belt linisher.

We then moved to **honing**. Maurice discussed the merits, or otherwise, of various systems, including oilstones, waterstones, diamond stones and abrasive papers, and again followed with a practical demonstration.

Finally **polishing**, and a discussion of the use of leather and wooden strops, together with a variety of honing pastes.

We had been invited to bring along a couple of our own tools, which we brought out for examination, accompanied by much head shaking and sucking in of breath. I, for one, had committed that most heinous of crimes, a secondary bevel on my favourite Ben Orford bushcraft knife.

The other participants had brought along tools they were finding awkward to sharpen: hook knives, curved gouges and draw knives.

We then set to, eager to try out all the techniques that we had witnessed. It soon became apparent that my main problem was impatience; I quickly decided that I should regard sharpening as an art in itself rather than a necessary evil detracting from my main purpose.

As there were only four of us on the course, Maurice was able to keep a keen eye on us at all times. He pointed out how important posture is, with a rigid body set, vital to maintain tool angles. We learned terms such as 'finding the bevel', 'interpreting the scratches' and 'reading the slurry'. He repeatedly stressed the paramount importance of safe use of the tools and equipment. Our group sustained only one minor injury, this while taking tools out of a bag!

All in all, this was a very enjoyable and productive day. Although the subject matter can involve some quite technical stuff, Maurice constantly maintained our interest through his own enthusiasm and passion. He offered plenty of peripheral information linked to the properties of wood and the uses of various tools.

I am very familiar with the old adage, 'The only thing more dangerous than a sharp tool is a blunt one.' Having attended this course, I feel far more confident in my base skills. I am sure that with practice and patience I will have a full set of sharp tools that are safer and easier to use.

Cumbria Woodlands
www.cumbriawoodlands.co.uk
Low Bridge End Farm
www.campingbarn.com
Woodsmith Experience
www.woodsmithexperience.co.uk

Instructor Maurice Pyle

Hands-on experience

A scene from the day

MAKITA 'FARMER'S CHOICE' EA5600F45DN 55.7CC CHAINSAW

Dick White discovers a powerful beast in the new Makita

Woodsman Dick White kindly agreed to give the new Makita 'Farmer's Choice' chainsaw a trial for Living Woods and has returned from the woods with information about it for anyone thinking of buying a new saw.

'This Makita chainsaw has a fairly simple construction,' Dick began, 'that seems robust. And the parts are easy to get to, which makes for easy maintenance. The great news is that the sprocket is mounted on top of the clutch drum, which has its closed face uppermost. This arrangement makes it an absolute joy to get the chain and bar back on and re-engage the chain. On many saws, the clutch drum has its open side facing upwards with the sprocket mounted beneath. Not only does this make it a bit more fiddly to re-engage the chain, but also the clutch drum fills with normal chainsaw debris, i.e. bits of green matter mixed with sawdust and chain-oil, which requires regular cleaning out for the clutch and brake to be at their most effective.

'The oil and fuel tank has the capacity to hold a greater amount of fuel than the saw I'm used to, which means it can run much longer,' he went on. 'But that is a double-edged sword, because more fuel means more weight. The design of the screw caps on the oil and petrol tanks is better than others I've seen. It's in an S-shape, so rather than poking in the end of a screwdriver to open them, you use the full length of the screwdriver. They seem much more durable.'

There were some details that gave Dick pause. 'I found the hood clips that hold the upper cover to be a bit small and fiddly. If I were wearing gloves, I would not be able to get them open. And the felling guide was more difficult to see


DART volunteers

CHRIS WESSENBORN

INDIRA KING

than on other chainsaws, because the guides have been colour-coordinated with the chainsaw, instead of having been designed to contrast. Mind you, most experienced chainsaw operators probably don't use the felling guide, though they can be quite useful.

'But the real story is the overall weight of this saw. It is quite a powerful beast, and you don't get that kind of engine without adding weight. Even in its raw state, without the bar, chain and fuel container, you would be hauling around 1.5 to 2kg more weight than you would with some other saws. That doesn't sound like a lot, but if you're working a full day in the woods, it really might be a burden.

'Having said that, this Makita is a really powerful saw. It goes through big logs without drawing breath. I have been cutting large, gnarly old oaks and it just chewed through them all. And with the large fuel tank, this is a chainsaw that can keep going for as long as you can. It needs refuelling less often than I need refuelling with a cup of coffee.'

'The saw arrived in a big metal strongbox,' Dick added, 'that I could certainly find a use for, but I can also say that I would not be hauling this heavy box up into the woods with me.'

Would Dick recommend the Makita 'Farmer's Choice'?

'I would say that this chainsaw lies at the semi-pro end of the range – and there are other choices from Makita – so it is probably too much saw for the occasional user or for the less experienced operator. They would probably not need a chainsaw this big or heavy – or expensive. But if someone is planning to be out working in the woods a lot, it is a long-running, powerful saw.

'I know that DART International (the Disaster Arborist Response Team) swear by them. They say that when they go out on deployment, they get to the other end, put fuel in, fire them up and they're away.

'The Makita Farmer's Choice would certainly give me food for thought if I were looking for a replacement chainsaw.'

Makita 'Farmer's Choice' EA5600F45DN
55.7cc Chainsaw RRP £510 + VAT
For full technical info and stockists:
makitauk.com

Dick White is a self-employed woodland manager and is also the woodlands.co.uk agent for Cornwall.

INDIRA KING

Clutch drum and sprocket

Meaner than a shark: THE 'CHAINSAW'

With winter management season in full swing, woodland owner **Bryan Perks** has blunt advice for chainsaw safety

Tools for woodwork of any kind have one thing in common: they need to be sharp and they must be handled with care. With experience, most people develop an instinct for how to do certain things, such as never cutting towards yourself with a knife. However, some dangers are not quite so obvious.

One of the easiest ways to cut wood is with a chainsaw, but it is also one of the deadliest tools you will ever handle, so trial and error is out the window. Treated and used correctly, it is safe. Use it without due care and attention and you are risking life or limb.

First, you have to read the instructions, not only for a chainsaw but also for every tool you buy.

Second, protective gear. I can hear many saying, 'I am only cutting logs so goggles are all I need!' You could not be more wrong.

Just think: the chain will slice through a piece of wood like a hot knife through butter. How would your head, arm or leg hold up against that chain?

You might think, 'I'm careful. That won't happen to me.' Professional lumberjacks know how to use their tools yet their job is listed as one of the most dangerous manual jobs around.

So what do you need to wear?

Chainsaw protective clothing comes in different grades. Much of it is designed to stop a chain running at 15m/second, better quality at 20m/second. Buy the best you can afford with the best stopping power.

Padded chainsaw clothing is designed to stop a petrol chainsaw, not an electric one.

Chainsaw clothing tears when a chain hits it, shredding it into small fibres. In a fraction of a second the chain carries the fibres to the drive gear, blocking it and stopping the chain dead.

Why does it not work on an electric chainsaw?

A petrol chainsaw relies on chain speed to

OLENA ILIENKO/ADOBESTOCK

KADMY/ADOBESTOCK

This professional is fully prepared to operate a chainsaw in safety

cut – high speed/low torque – but an electric chainsaw relies on a higher torque from the motor to propel a slower chain.

Because an electric chainsaw has that extra torque, the fibres may slow – but not stop – the drive gear. The chain will slow down, which will limit injury, but injury is still a possibility.

So protective clothing will still offer some defense against the electric chainsaw. It just will not perform as it was intended.

What do you need to buy?

Gloves. Most only offer left hand protection from the chain, but some offer both.

Trousers, bib and brace or chaps. Some offer all-round the leg protection, but some just the front of the leg. When you are cutting at all angles felling a tree, all-round protection is best. For simple log cutting, the front protection will suffice. Some bib and brace offer mid-torso protection as well. Any protection is better than none.

Boots. Chainsaw boots may look like short wellies or like expensive walking boots, but the visual aspect is the only similarity. They have steel toe caps/heels and some have metal sole plates. All will have chain-proof material incorporated into their construction, protecting you from a front hit by the chain.

Helmet with visor and ear protectors. This will protect you from an upward kickback (see box) by the saw, flying chipping and the noise of a petrol engine. Although not designed to stop a chainsaw, the helmet and visor will help to deflect any head hit and will help to protect you from falling branches.

Padded Jacket. Good protection but expensive. Offers the same protection as the other items.

Right. Now that you are all kitted out in your protective gear and ready to cut wood, I want to offer some basic tips.

Starting the saw. Battery and electric saws are easy to use. Make sure your chain oil tank is full and you are away from other people. For petrol chainsaws, fill the oil tank, mix your fuel away from your working area and then fill the fuel tank. Always follow the manufacturer's fuel specifications and their starting procedure.

Place the saw on the floor, slide your foot through the handle and hold it down securely. With one hand on the top handle, make sure the chain brake is on, set the throttle/choke and pull the starter cord. Wait until the saw is running evenly before you pick it up. Always hold the saw with both hands securely. If you do have a kickback, you do not want to be holding it 'limp wristed'.

With the log securely mounted on a suitable surface, make sure the area is safe to work in and no one is near.

Stand behind the saw, slightly to the left of where you are going to cut. With your feet solidly on the ground, release the safety brake and try your first cut. Use the centre of the bar on the top of the wood, ensuring that the tip does not come into contact with the wood and, applying nice even pressure, allow the saw to cut through the log. Well done, that is your first cut.

Things to remember: firm grip, stand slightly to the left and keep your feet set firmly. As you cut, the log will support the saw, so expect the increase in weight as you break through the bottom and the log drops. Stop the saw and check the chain tension every few cuts and check the oil level.

This starting procedure is a proven safe method. If the saw cannot move, it cannot damage you. A solid stance needs no explanation. You stand to the left and behind the saw because the chain is on the right. If it were to snap, it would flick back on the right hand side. A kickback will lift it up vertically, so, again, it's safer to be out of the way.

Chainsaws have other safety features. If there is a kickback, as soon as the brake on the top of the saw contacts your body, it will lock the chain. A small piece of metal is located at the base of the saw. This is a chain catcher to catch the chain if it snaps. You will also note that the bottom of the handle is wider than the top; this serves the same purpose. I mentioned gloves. Rarely does a kickback injure the hand if you are holding the saw correctly and firmly, but a snapping chain can whip back onto your hands and then the glove comes into its own.

I hope this article has inspired at least one person to take the safe route. I see so many chainsaw users on TV and videos who do not.

I have one final word: never think you know it all. Take the same care with the final cut as you did with the first and always watch out for the unexpected to happen.

A kickback occurs when the top quadrant of the tip of the chain bar comes into contact with the wood. Rather than cut into the wood, as the bottom quadrant would do, it lifts the saw up off the log and kicks it into the air. This is not a slow thing – it happens in a fraction of a second and that is why a firm grip is essential.

READY FOR TROUBLE

Carlton Boyce creates a bespoke woodland trauma kit

The late Fred Dibnah struck a chord with folk like us who love working in the woods when he said, 'Everything I like in life is heavy, dirty or dangerous.' Woodland work is fun, yes, but if we have an accident in the woods, it's likely to be serious. Chainsaws are indiscriminate in their choice of material and devastating in their efficacy. Working in a remote location ups the ante even further, so a momentary lapse of concentration can prove fatal.

I'm not a professional medic, but I have had a fair bit of first aid training with the police and the prison service. I have put together my own woodland and wild space emergency trauma kit that goes everywhere with me when I'm out in the countryside. I believe it's fit for the risks I face, but please treat this article as a guide to producing your own major trauma first aid kit, rather than a definitive list of equipment that will save your life under all circumstances. Knowledge is far more important than stuff when things go horribly wrong.

The first item in my kit is a decent tourniquet. While a belt, tie, length of paracord or rope will do the job, a proper tactical tourniquet does it better. It's fastened in place with Velcro with a strong plastic bar to tighten it – sometimes it takes an awful lot of pressure to stop an arterial bleed. It cost less than a tenner.

There is white space to write the time it was applied, something you should always do. A tourniquet produces tissue damage if it's left on for too long and paramedics will need this information when they arrive to treat and evacuate the casualty. A permanent marker pen might be a useful addition to the kit.

The second items are a couple of Israeli emergency bandages, some clever kit that was designed for use by the armed forces under combat conditions. The bandage is in a sealed, vacuum-packed plastic packet, so it takes up little room and remains sterile.

STEPHEN FAULKNER / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Skinny Medic: www.youtube.com/user/SkinnyMedic
Israeli bandages: www.israelifirstaid.com

Application is straightforward, and because the bandage is stretchy and goes through a solid plastic cleat to apply leverage, a huge amount of pressure can be applied directly to the bleeding wound, helping staunch the flow of blood. The end of the bandage clips firmly in place and won't come loose no matter how much jolting the patient receives. They commonly come in two sizes, and I bought both the four-inch and six-inch versions in a twin pack from Amazon for £16.

The third item I carry in my trauma kit is a sachet of Celox-infused gauze. This haemostatic gauze promotes rapid blood clotting in severe arterial bleeding in the sort of places that a tourniquet or Israeli bandage wouldn't work. To apply, you press the gauze into the wound with a finger followed by direct, firm pressure for at least five minutes to allow a clot to form. I paid just under £40 for one.

Fourth is a SAM splint, a clever thing designed to splint broken limbs. It comes on a roll and is simply unfurled, folded to size and held in place with a bandage. I'm not sure it is an essential part of your emergency trauma kit, but at around £10 I think it's worth popping in anyway.

I keep these items in a bright red first aid pouch (about £10) along with the usual plasters, painkillers, bottles of eyewash solution, tweezers and a pair of clothing shears. I'd guess that my total investment is around £100.

I stuff the first aid kit into a bright red waterproof bag (another fiver) to keep it clean and dry. When I get to my workplace I hang it in a prominent place and make sure everyone I'm working with knows where it is. It sits in the

JEFF MORGAN 09 / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

boot of my car when I'm not carrying it with me, in case I happen upon a serious road traffic accident before the emergency services arrive.

I'm a belt-and-braces sort of chap, so I when I'm working outdoors, I wear an emergency whistle around my neck. The sound cuts through the buzz of a chainsaw far more effectively and carries farther than shouting for help.

None of this kit alongside you is going to be any use unless you've been trained to use it by professionals who know what they're doing. Most outdoor providers can suggest a first aid course, but do make sure they know the sort of risks you're going to be facing and tailor the training syllabus accordingly. Expect to pay £200+ per person. Everyone working alongside you should have at least a basic knowledge of emergency first aid.

If you can't afford professional training (and being too tight-fisted is not an excuse) then YouTube is a great resource for learning the basics. I've found Skinny Medic to be reliable, experienced and very watchable.

Avoid working alone wherever possible, especially if you're operating dangerous tools like chainsaws – although my stepfather severed an artery on a pair of garden shears, proving that even hand tools can cause life-threatening injuries.

In that case, something like a McMurdo Fast Find 220 PLB (Personal Locator Beacon) summons help at the push of a button. It's hardly bigger than a packet of cigarettes, powered by a long-life battery. It's not cheap at around £175, but there are few more reliable ways to scramble the emergency services and guide them to your precise location, no matter how remote.

Finally, the cost of appropriate personal protective equipment must form an integral part of your planning from day one, and if you can't afford to buy top-quality safety gear then you shouldn't start work. The same goes for training in the safe and effective use of any tool you're going to be using. An axe, a four-wheel-drive vehicle or a chainsaw can all kill you or inflict life-changing injuries. Never underestimate the risk they pose.

I'll leave you with another quote from Fred Dibnah. He preferred stone to wood and was talking about working at the top of a chimney, but the risks we face are similar: 'If you make one mistake, it's half a day out with the undertaker.'

TANAT VALLEY FIREWOOD

SEEING THE FUTURE

A fall and a rest gave **Daniel Patrick** time to ponder the big questions

'Where's your phone?' my friend asked matter-of-factly as he looked down at me lying on the concrete floor of the Cow Shed. 'It's in the van,' I replied just as calmly. I could see the hole in the roof that I had fallen through. Curling my toes and wriggling my fingers told me that nothing major was broken – I was conscious, coherent and very lucky. An MRI scan confirmed it, although it felt like everything was broken when I got out of bed in the mornings for several weeks after my fall.

The month I was out of action gave me time to reflect on new ideas for the direction of travel for my business, Tanat Valley Firewood. I realised that my being behind the tractor converting waste wood and windfall into firewood was not the best use of my time. I had established myself as someone who buys waste and windfall for wood fuel, but why not have others do the actual processing? What other sourcing opportunities were there in the Tanat Valley? Part of the answer came from a sawmill I had visited. The owner offered to sell me a large quantity of logs from their slab wood, the waste first cuts that come from converting tree trunks into sawn timber. After the initial deliveries, the mill owner asked if I had any work for his son, and I now have help that is younger and stronger than I am, who brings waste firewood when he comes to work three days a week.

As the business enjoys early growth, we sold more firewood last summer than we did in the winter. Sales, marketing and logistics have become the mainstay of what I do, arranging inbound deliveries just in time to meet demand for the coming year. Trees come down when the strong winds blow, making it difficult to plan, and tree surgeons call when they have arisings, as their waste is referred to. Increasingly, though, homeowners keep their felled trees for their own fire. Local small woods owners ask us to do the first or second thinning in their woods in exchange for the timber. The tree fellas tell me that the cost of the extraction can be greater than the value of the firewood, so while this could be part of the bigger picture of assisting in management of local woodland, it could also be a drain on scarce resources.

When I started on this journey, I planned to sell £30k worth of firewood a year, work four days a week and spend the rest with the family on the holding. We have managed the first part, but have yet to see a sustainable living from the business year round. They say that it is difficult to make a living from selling firewood unless you are very small or very large – I have seen both ends of the spectrum and tend to agree. If you work out of a pickup truck with your chainsaw and don't have too many mouths to feed, then perhaps you can manage it. Or if you are a big operator, processing large quantities of cordwood before force drying it, burning taxpayers' pounds under the guise of the Renewable Heat Initiative, then that can work for you. Alternatively you might buy wood from Eastern Europe where it is clear-felled and kiln-dried before being trucked across Europe, and sell it at a profit. The customer sits in front of their log burner warm in the knowledge that they are helping the environment by burning firewood

rather than oil or gas.

If scale is an option for business sustainability, scope should also be considered. £28k is what the Joseph Rowntree Foundation tells us we, as a family of four, need to live in 21st century Britain. The problem is that folk buy firewood only half of the year. What do you do in the other half to provide the other £14k? What other products and services can we offer the community? I am working out what can flow from our current supplier base through our facilities, be repackaged, value added and then redistributed on existing vehicles to our current customer base, that is also inversely seasonal to the firewood. Part of the answer may come with gardening supplies and services.

> ***The problem is that folk buy firewood only half of the year.***

For me the question lies on a deeper level: what do we wish to do with our three score years and ten? Is the aim to make as much money as you can and then spend it before you die, or are there non-financial goals that have greater worth? Can we work cooperatively for a wider gain, both economically and environmentally? Could we run Tanat Valley Firewood as a community interest company where the benefit is shared throughout the area? Could we provide local transport services similar to the old post bus where folk would travel through rural areas with the postie, with routes and schedules backed up by live vehicle location online? Or why not offer electric pool cars that we charge through the solar panels and the biomass boiler? Could we dare to think that Tanat Valley Firewood could be a centre of best practice for rural economic development through sustainable energy generation? We owe it to our children to ask these questions.

In the meantime, we have established an excellent supplier base and are lucky to have an expanding customer base that appreciates our passion for providing a sustainable and positive rural, low carbon, firewood lifestyle.

Family life, I have come to realise, doesn't have to be perfect to be wonderful. I try to capture the essence of our family life here on the hillside in my regular blog on our website, inspired by the article I wrote for *Living Woods* last spring. If you can't come to us in person, please visit us there.

www.tanatvalleyfirewood.co.uk

Oak delivery

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DANIEL PATRICK 'ANYWHERE

TRUG Interaction

David Hunter spends a day with master trug maker Richard Bingham

As the son of an avid gardener, and growing up near Sussex, I have trugs etched into my childhood memories. A trug is a strong, lightweight vessel made traditionally from sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*) and cricket bat willow (*Salix alba var. coerula*). Trugs were widely used in agriculture prior to mechanisation, but around the time of the Second World War they were left behind by farmers and found new popularity with gardeners. Trugs endure as practical tools in gardens and homes around the world to this day – my own dad still uses three of them in the garden. Thomas Smith made the first trug in the 1820's in the village of Herstmonceux, East Sussex, and it was here that I was to try my hand at the craft.

My tutor is Richard Bingham, one of a very few remaining makers of the traditional Sussex trug. He has been doing this since 1979. A quick look around Richard's workshop makes one thing clear – the tools and equipment have remained largely unchanged since trugs were created. A shave horse sits in one corner, surrounded by long thin shavings. A homemade steamer for bending the chestnut rim and handle is nestled into another while a workbench runs across the far wall. Some mechanisation has crept in – band saws are used for some of the bulkier wood removal early in the process – but were Thomas Smith to amble in, he would recognize most of the tools in this workshop.

Richard has run many trug-making courses (including at the annual Bodgers Ball) and his patience and skill are evident. To start with, I shave the sawn slats of willow, which will make up the base of the trug, to the correct thickness and width with the drawknife. The process is hypnotic and more difficult than Richard makes it look. Willow's changing grains lie in wait for the unwary and I find it easy to make a mess of the fine work. When I have safely produced a set of slats, I wet them and leave them in a

plastic bag so they won't dry out and will be supple enough to be manipulated into place during the final assembly.

The rim and handle are my next challenge. Again I set to shaving them to the correct thickness. I optimistically hand my 'finished' pieces to Richard several times, but with the expert feel of the craftsman, he bends and flexes my offerings before giving them back with the shake of a head stating that there is more to come off. Too much wood in the rim and handle now could lead to breakage when it is bent to shape later – a waste of time and materials, both of which are precious.

Once Richard approves of my work, I place the chestnut into the steamer. When we return after lunch with energy renewed, the pieces are supple enough to be bent without breaking. Richard takes one rod from the steamer and bends it round a former (a wooden block the right shape for the handle) before tacking it into place. He repeats the same technique to make the rim. The process looks effortless and I confidently step up to the steamer, remove my handle piece, place it in the former and find myself grunting and sweating as I work to bend the chestnut to shape. Not so effortless after all.

Once the frame is complete, I start fitting the slats into place. This, I confess, I had a lot of help with. The feel and experience to finely tune each slat to fit just right is something that comes only with time. I enjoy Richard's deftness as he works masterfully and instinctively. When the slats are in, I slice away the excess. Last, I fit the feet (made again from cricket bat willow) and there it is, a traditional Sussex trug.

As I hold the finished piece, I see why the design has changed so little over nearly two centuries. The trug is extremely light, yet I have no doubt of its strength. I can think of a multitude of uses for it, collecting anything from garden clippings to hens' eggs. Indoors, I might use it as a fruit bowl or firewood basket. Trugs of all shapes and sizes are everywhere in Richard's house, including one full of carrots fresh from the garden.

I think the day has been a great success. I am pleased with my trug and delighted to have spent a day learning to make it in the very village where it was created. To work alongside someone who has been practicing his craft for nearly 40 years is a privilege and I learnt a great deal about not just trug making but greenwood working and true craftsmanship.

Richard Bingham tacks the willow slats into place

DAVID HUNTER

Richard Bingham lives in Herstmonceux, East Sussex, where he has been making beautiful trugs since 1979. www.wealdcrafts.co.uk/richardbingham

David Hunter is a coppice worker in west Wales where he manages a woodland and is an instructor at Coppicewood College, a skills centre for traditional coppice management techniques in Cilgerran, Pembrokeshire. coppicewoodcollege.co.uk

Bending TO HER WILL

Inspired by rake and chair maker **David Wheeler**, Strumpshaw Tree Fair's **Candy Sheridan** tries steam bending

Whenever I've admired wonderfully crafted hand made chairs, I've wondered how these are made and how difficult they might be to create. Rake and chair maker David Wheeler attended our first Tree Fair at Strumpshaw in 2016. I was fascinated by his 'Star Gazer' bentwood reclining seat and not just for its romantic name. I wanted to know his method of creating it.

When David invited me to attend his 'Steam Bending Workshop in the Woods', I could not wait! We met in Bradfield Woods, owned and managed by Suffolk Wildlife Trust, next to David's wood-fired boiler and wooden steam chest, for the morning session. It was a course for beginners and we started the day by wandering into the woods and selecting our own hazel coppice shoot for the first task of making a walking stick. At this point I got to sit on a shave horse, which was actually very comfortable. And I used a drawknife to remove the bark, which was therapeutic, both the action and the result.

We put the sticks inside the steam box for half an hour to become more pliable.
For the bending process, a former, in this case a disc of hardwood, was fixed to a plywood base secured to the bench top. A rectangular block of beech to which was bolted a stainless steel strap (stainless steel to prevent staining of the hot, damp wood), also served as a wedging stop, and was fixed approximately the distance of the average stick thickness from the disc. The object of the stainless steel strap is to minimise the risk of the wood splitting, snapping or delaminating. To allow for the natural variation in the thickness of hazel sticks, a wooden wedge could be forced in place to fill any gap to further help prevent the wood breaking or delaminating as each freshly steamed stick was pulled slowly and carefully around the circumference of the disc. There was a team spirit as we were encouraged, cajoled and cheered by David and the other participants on the course as we pulled, stretched and tugged our sticks around the former. Before removing the stick from the former, the bent handle was held securely in place by baler twine. They were then stacked by the fire to dry.

I was really impressed with this process. I think this should be demonstrated at wood fairs, so we plan to offer it at Strumpshaw Tree Fair next year. People who attend wood fairs are accustomed to going home with whistles, carved spoons or their own scorched wood designs, so why not bent handle walking sticks?

The afternoon session involved a trickier process. The challenge was to make a simple stool with only three major components, two legs and a seat. The pieces of ash for the legs (cut from last winter's coppiced thinnings from Bradfield Woods), had already been prepared to width and thickness, but we needed to cut them to length accurately, ready for the bending strap. Because the straps have a wooden stop at each end, the length is critical to prevent the wood buckling as it is bent around the former. After trial and error with the length of time the legs were left in the steam chest, (about 30 minutes proved just right), the task of bending these around the heavily clamped former was very hard work! There were two bending formers (to help speed things along), comprising laminated layers of 18mm birch plywood to a depth exactly that of the width of the stool legs, (about 2in, 50mm). The formers were shaped to give the profile to the stool legs and were clamped to the bench top to counteract the forces exerted on the bending straps. Again, stainless steel straps were used to prevent the wood from peeling or de-laminating. To ensure the workpieces followed the curves of the former, two heavy 'G' cramps were placed at the point of maximum stress on the leg curves. As with the stick bending challenge, there were a few 'failures' but far fewer, only two out of 20 bends. A failure is a buckling or fracturing of the timber, a fact of woodworking life that even the most

Attaching the legs to the finished stools

Top: David Wheeler puts sticks into the steam box

Left: Candy Sheridan experiences drawknife therapy

Below: G cramps hold the legs in place

accomplished furniture makers endure!

The stool seats were pieces of ash cut from Bradfield Woods using an Alaskan Saw Mill, a chainsaw attachment that serves as a guide to cut parallel boards from a tree trunk. This wood had cupped as it dried and formed a natural hollow seat shape. We measured and cut the seats to length using a very light Japanese saw. I must put one on my Christmas list, as it was such a pleasure to use!

Fixing the seats to the legs was a simple 'nuts and bolts' process. Using David's hand turned pillar drill, we marked and bored four quarter-inch holes through the legs and seats. 6mm bolts, nuts and washers were used giving the whole structure integrity and strength.

It was a wonderful day among trees, making new friends and going home with two items that I can use and show off! Courses like this are available throughout the country, but I can recommend David's for its good balance, not merely watching but joining in at every process.

In the future when I walk past that 'Star Gazer' seat or a beautiful stool or bentwood chair, I can really appreciate the amount of work, the skills and the length of time that went into these skilfully crafted items.

Try steam bending at Strumpshaw Tree Fair 21 - 22 July 2018, see the superb handcrafted items, and chat to the carvers, designers and crafters. www.strumpshawtreefair.co.uk

A Book of Trees and W

Peter Fiennes's new book explores how trees have shaped Britain and how Britons shape our forests

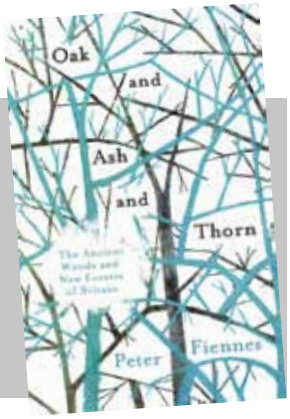
When he began *Oak and Ash and Thorn: The Ancient Woods and New Forests of Britain*, Peter Fiennes intended to write a book whose chapters would fall into orderly themes. But, with the power of wild things, the woodlands drew him off his path and into a discursive rumination about natural and personal history, environmental and human loss, myth and fairy tale. In one chapter, he masterfully relates the history of Britain's woods from the year 5,000BC to the present in 3,508 words exactly, each word equal to two years. The book, seasoned with a wealth of poetry, ends with a moment of mysterious connection. It manages to be both erudite and heartfelt. In *Oak and Ash and Thorn*, Fiennes skillfully draws readers into the urgent task of learning about and preserving our irreplaceable natural inheritance.

A city-dweller now, Fiennes gained his reverence for forests in his youth.

'I had a very privileged childhood,' he says, 'growing up among woods. When I was considering this book, I was feeling disenchanted, and I started walking among trees on Wimbledon Common. My walks became a quest to find the magic in the woods. The woods give us this: the time to think, to be solitary, to puzzle things out, to absorb what is around us.'

He longs for us to put nature at the heart of our daily lives.

'We live at nature poverty level. Children are engaged by shiny toys that offer immediate gratification and we enjoy living very comfortable lives. Meanwhile, everything happening just out of our sight is what really matters.'



Oak and Ash and Thorn: The Ancient Woods and New Forests of Britain
by Peter Fiennes
published by Oneworld, £16.99

SHEFFIELD AND ROTHERHAM WILDLIFE TRUST

Smithy Wood

Woods and People

OAK AND ASH AND THORN: THE ANCIENT WOODS AND NEW FORESTS OF BRITAIN

Old, Old Story

Peter Fiennes explores an ancient woodland marked for destruction to make way for a motorway service station

At least I've now found Smithy Wood. The path that skirts the edge offers all sorts of different ways into the trees, some of them narrow single tracks, others wide and muddy and ploughed by heavy vehicles. I leave it as long as I can (for some reason I'm especially reluctant to let go of the open skies today, despite the doom-laden clouds), but eventually I duck under a low-hanging hazel and enter the woods. It's dark here; and still. Someone, perhaps from the business park, has been dumping barrels and wires and plastic detritus, and the outer reaches of the wood are fringed with the shabby cast-offs of modern life. The high green bracken and the violet flowers of the arched brambles hide some of it, as does a rising tide of young birch trees, but there's no avoiding the smear of flytipping. Deeper in and there's self-seeded oak, alder and ash. Mostly, though, as the forest path curls towards the sound of the motorway, it is beech that emerges as the dominant woodland species, the trees probably planted as timber over a hundred years ago, once the demand for coppicing had fallen away. The path opens into a grove of widely spaced beech trees and a blackbird shrieks a warning, briefly puncturing the incessant moaning of the motorway, which has been following me around the wood like the background throb of the Terminator soundtrack. The ground in this grove, under its beech-soft green canopy, has been churned and mashed by a thousand spinning tyres, ripping up the woodland banks and shredding the trees. The blackbird falls silent. There's something sullen in the air.

…

Smithy Wood needs rescuing. There's no getting away from the fact that it's not in good shape. In one tiny corner of the wood, where four-wheel drives have been most active, there are three old tyres, several plastic bottles and cans, crisp packets, pipes, a yellow plastic ball, the chewed top of a yellow plastic cone, half a plastic bumper, an exhaust pipe, carrier bags hanging from the branches, many empty beer bottles, sweet packets and the mangled remains of a birch tree that has been torn off at the roots. But that is all the more reason for smothering this place with love, for clearing the undergrowth of the rubbish, for bringing back vitality and living joy to the woods. It can happen almost overnight. Everything it needs is already in the wood and the soil: the seed and fungi, the saplings and the teeming underground fauna. Nature is resilient, if we'll just leave her alone for long enough, and it's easy to see how Smithy Wood can once again become a place of beauty and life. Surely we can plant and preserve enough woods, everywhere, so that people can even drive their 4x4s, or gun each other down with paint, as well as stand and marvel in tranquillity. If we are serious about getting

> ***Smithy Wood needs rescuing. There's no getting away from the fact that it's not in good shape.***

people into the woods, because that's the only way that anyone ever learns to care about them, then we have to make them available for all sorts of activities. We should unleash the off-roaders and the paintballers into their own corners of the conifer plantations. But let's not grub up any more irreplaceable ancient woodland to make way for yet another service station.

We want to believe that anyone spending enough time in the woods will learn to love them. As the twinkly old forester in *The Children of the New Forest* says: 'This is a bad world, and I thank Heaven that I have lived in the woods.' We like to think that the woods cultivate goodness, and that even the most corrupt heart will soften and melt in a sun-dappled glade, and maybe it will, but it's probably best not to take it for granted. We will always need to fight for our woods. People are busy, and others don't care, and where there's money to be made the woods will always suffer. There are many people who hate and fear the wild places. In times of uncertainty, or turmoil, they take their chances. In the early 1660s, as the new parliament argued about how best to preserve Britain's supply of timber, and in particular the incredible reserves of trees in the Forest of Dean, a man called Sir John Winter simply cut them all down. In the year 1661 there were thirty thousand mature oaks in the Forest of Dean; six years later there were fewer than two hundred. This man had lived among the trees all his life – he was a landowner and an ironmaster – but he liked money more.

Our woods are better protected these days, but we don't have enough of them, and we cannot afford to lose any more. The naturalists have been saying this for years. Here's Paul Sterry writing in 2007 in the inspiring but sober setting of the *Collins Complete Guide to British Trees*, all of a sudden sounding like that soldier in Apocalypse Now who snaps and disappears into the jungle: 'Sell the house. Sell the car. Sell the kids…':

For me, considering how little we have left, the loss or degradation of any more ancient semi-natural woodland is wanton vandalism. To combat further decline, I would urge anybody interested in trees to donate as much money as possible to conservation bodies for the purchase of land. In this context, the only organisations that I would consider donating money to personally are the Wildlife Trusts, the Woodland Trust, the National Trust and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

Peter Fiennes

> ***Nature is resilient, if we'll just leave her alone for long enough.***

Indeed. Sell everything! Protect the land! It's not like there isn't a plan to save and conserve and spread our woods. There is – it's very simple and it has been elegantly explained many times by a parade of persuasive and well-informed people. Forests have been felled to make the books that tell us how to save them. At least the tide has turned since the Locust Years, and even the Forestry Commission has now added a hefty portion of native broadleaf trees into its planting mix. The Woodland Trust alone has 1.5 million members. And yet, for all that, the destruction goes on. We lost one hundred ancient woods in the last decade and there are currently over five hundred more under threat from development, and not just from hubristic railway plans, but from everyday neglect, golf courses, out-of-town centres, and any number of illusory schemes. Over the same period, in just ten years, three-quarters of our butterfly species have declined and tens of millions of birds have disappeared from the woods. We know all this, even if we'd rather not.

The pressure is relentless, but we have to believe that the devastation can be halted and reversed.

For news about Smithy Wood: wildsheffield.com/smithywood

Tom Wheeler

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

DEAR LIVING WOODS READERS,

If you've paused to read the letter from the publisher on page 3, you know that this is the last issue of *Living Woods Magazine* in its present printed form, and my last issue as editor. The magazine will continue to appear online providing news and features of interest and value to everyone who cares for Britain's woodlands.

These are hard times for print media and I am most grateful to Angus Hanton of woodlands.co.uk for sustaining *Living Woods*. Without his support, *Living Woods* would not have existed over the past two years, nor would it be looking forward to its online future.

If you have contributed to *Living Woods* over the past two years, thank you so much. Every writer, illustrator, photographer, provider of news and ideas, member of the editorial, design and admin team has added to the fund of shared knowledge of the woodland community.

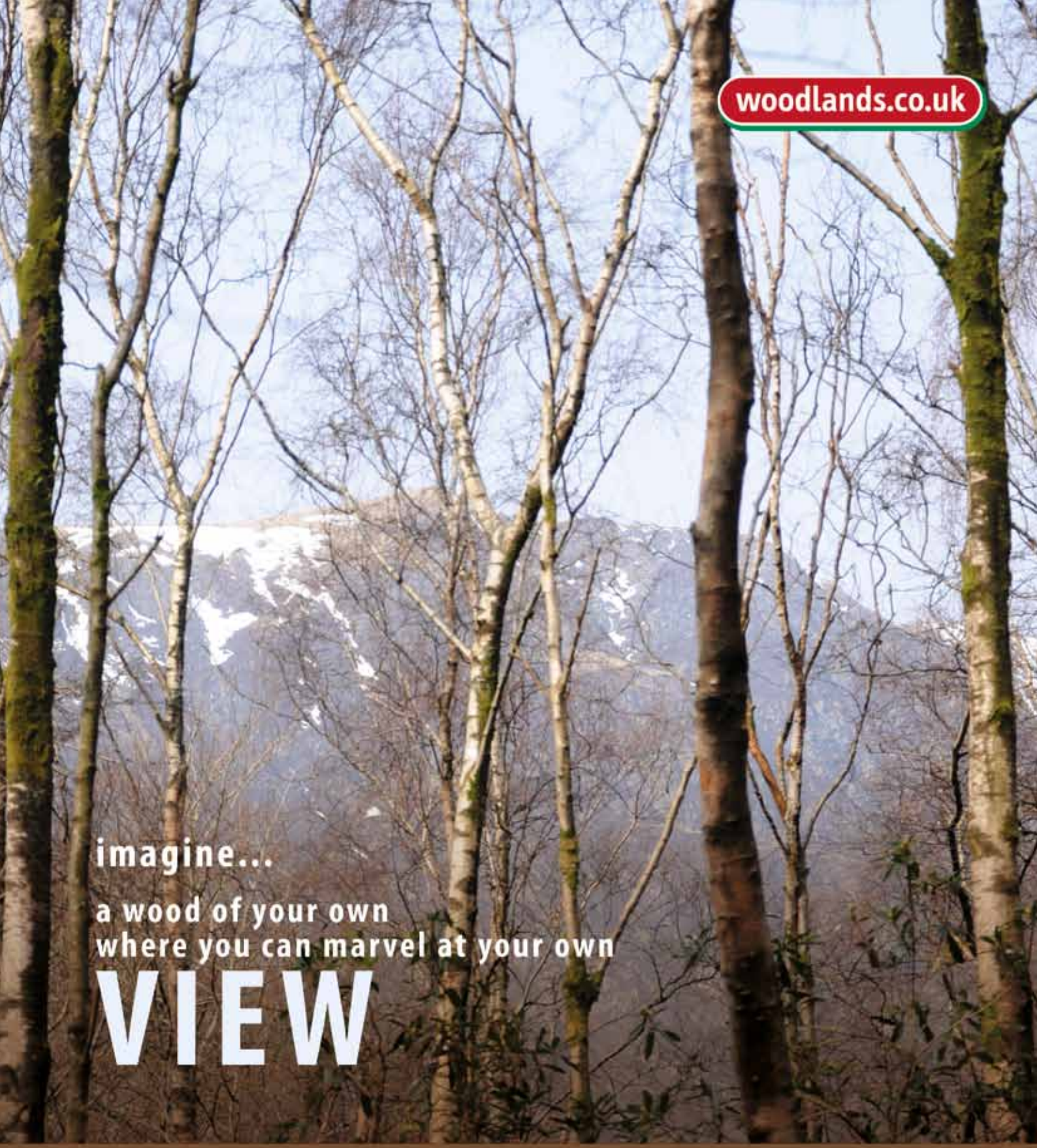
And many thanks to you, the *Living Woods* readers. As I've travelled around and met some of you, I have found you to be a knowledgeable, impassioned and talkative group whose unifying characteristic is best described as generosity of spirit. It has been a privilege to get to know you through *Living Woods*.

The important thing is that we all know that we have battles ahead of us. Our MPs need to know our thoughts about protecting our borders from the importation of further diseases and damaging non-native species. They need to hear from us, and loudly, about preserving ancient woodlands. Our elected officials must know that the housing crisis affects woodland workers, too. Our young people need to learn traditional skills from us and need to know that Britain's woodlands are theirs, for learning, for work, for enjoyment. Our local officials need to help us deal with fly-tipping and destructive trespassing, as much as planning officers need to be educated about the requirement for sensitive and appropriate building in woodlands. And that's just the beginning. We all need to continue to shape the future to benefit Britain's woodlands.

> ***We all need to continue to shape the future to benefit Britain's woodlands.***

The new editor will be Judith Millidge, currently the editor of the Small Woodland Owners' Group (SWOG) Newsletter. She is not only a woodland owner herself but also an experienced editor and seamless networker with a finger on the pulse of woodland issues. It is impossible for me to imagine anyone better placed to guide *Living Woods* into its new incarnation and I wish Judith and the magazine every success.

Nancy Wood
Editor
nancy@livingwoodsmagazine.co.uk



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