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Living Woods
Magazine

Britain's Ancient Woodlands

Author Derek Niemann on the Battle to Save Them

Six Things To Do in the Woods With Children Now

Plus: Scottish Woodlots, Old Saws, New Saws

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Editor's comment

Cover author Derek Niemann's (interview p 8) new book on Britain's ancient woodlands is a future classic. The chapter excerpted (p 9) takes us to Waresley Wood to become acquainted with soil and oxlips.

Internationally known wood artist Stephen Hogbin inspired his community to appreciate the trees around them.

The New Sylva's Gabriel Hemery (Woodnote p 48), muses on the regenerative effect of woodland management and his new story.

May trouble disdain you,
Your friends entertain you,
And until the spring
May your woodpile sustain you.

We wish you the best of the season.

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Cover photograph by Sarah Niemann

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More Canopy, Chainsaw Care

Planting for the Future
Woodland owners and managers seeking guidance on species that are likely to be resilient long-term to climate variation may look to the National Forest Company (NFC). At their site on Nanpantan Road in Leicestershire, a trial is underway to test suitability of a variety of species with predictions for success based the Forestry Commission Ecological Site Classification models. Species include Western Red Cedar, Western Hemlock, Serbian Spruce, Deodar and Japanese Red Cedar. In addition, according to Simon West, Head of Forestry for NFC, 'We have begun to use species such as Silver Fir to underplant areas of ash on some of our sites, as the ash is likely to die out in the short to medium term. We would like to use such areas to demonstrate to other owners and managers options for managing their own areas of ash planting that may be similarly affected in the future.'

©Zaha Hadid Architects

World's First Wooden Football Stadium
In Stroud! The Forest Green Rovers football club has commissioned world-renowned architectural practice Zaha Hadid Architects (London 2012 Olympics Aquatic Centre, among many other projects) to design the world's first football stadium to be made of sustainably sourced timber. The Rovers are already moving towards maximum sustainability via their organic pitch, solar-powered lawnmower, solar panels and vegan diet. The stadium will sit at the heart of a 100-acre ecopark with facilities to benefit the surrounding community. We applaud the effort, hope the 'surrounding community' is happy with this development and wonder where in the photo the parking lots will be.

Woodland Gains and Losses
A report from the scientists at National Forest Inventory says that woodland canopy in Great Britain is undergoing a period of significant change. Over the period 2006 to 2015, it is estimated that we gained 107,000 hectares of woodland area, more than 3.5% growth during the period studied. But we also permanently lost 123 hectares of identified ancient woodland sites, 'converted' to built land uses, primarily mineral extraction and urban development. The NFI used both satellite imaging and fieldwork to compile their report, and as it's full of good detail and scientific caveats, this short paragraph can't do it justice. You can find it here with a bit of clicking: forestry.gov.uk/inventory.

Safety Freebie
Want a free reference on chainsaw management? The nice people at Makita UK have teamed up with David Vickers of Drivelink Training to create a 131-page free-to-download book covering the theory and practice of maintaining a chainsaw in regular use. It is most suited to neophytes and those

e, Grants Guidance, Big Shed

taking their Level 2 assessment. David Vickers is an experienced City & Guilds NPTC trainer and assessor. Not a surprise that the many – very useful – photographs feature smart aqua blue chainsaws. Download at: www.matikauk.com/a-guide-to-chainsaw-maintenance-free-book.html.

Changing Landscapes Grants Open

If you have land in or near The National Forest in the Midlands and are interested in applying for a Changing Landscapes Grant, the applications round opens January, 2017. Grants provide up to 100% funding to create new woodlands and associated habitats. You may want to keep this in mind from their offices, 'Public access is a really big priority for us. We're particularly interested in landowners who can put forward land that might link into the network of footpaths that cover the area and also be close to existing woodlands that have been created across the last 25 years and beyond.' Contact Simon West at the NFC on 01283 551211 or email swest@nationalforest.org

Laurels for Mytting

Norwegian Wood has won the British Book Industry Awards' prize for Non-Fiction Book of the Year 2016. Translated by Robert Ferguson and published in the UK by MacLehose Press, *Norwegian Wood* is a tale of the early glory days of the Beatles before Yoko arrived on the scene. Just kidding. It's about wood, how to cut it, dry it, stack it, burn it and also about tools, history, science (lots of science). If *Living Woods* gave book prizes, Mytting's would be on the podium.

Father Christmas Really Flies

Dangerous Dads (*LW*, June, 2016) is sending its founder Ian Blackwell – dressed as Santa Claus – flying down the UK's longest zip-wire at The Eden Project in Cornwall on 10 December to raise money for its excellent projects. If you can aid them in reaching their £200 goal, you'll be helping some young children get very muddy this year. justgiving.com/crowdfunding/dangerous-dads

Hot Air

Persistent drought has killed one-third of California's trees, according to the US Forest Service. That's more than 102million dead since 2010, mainly in the southern and central Sierra Nevada. Meanwhile, across the continent, more than thirty wildfires are burning in six southeastern states and the smoke is visible from satellites. Maybe now their elections are over, the smoke will clear and the hot air will dissipate. We can hope.

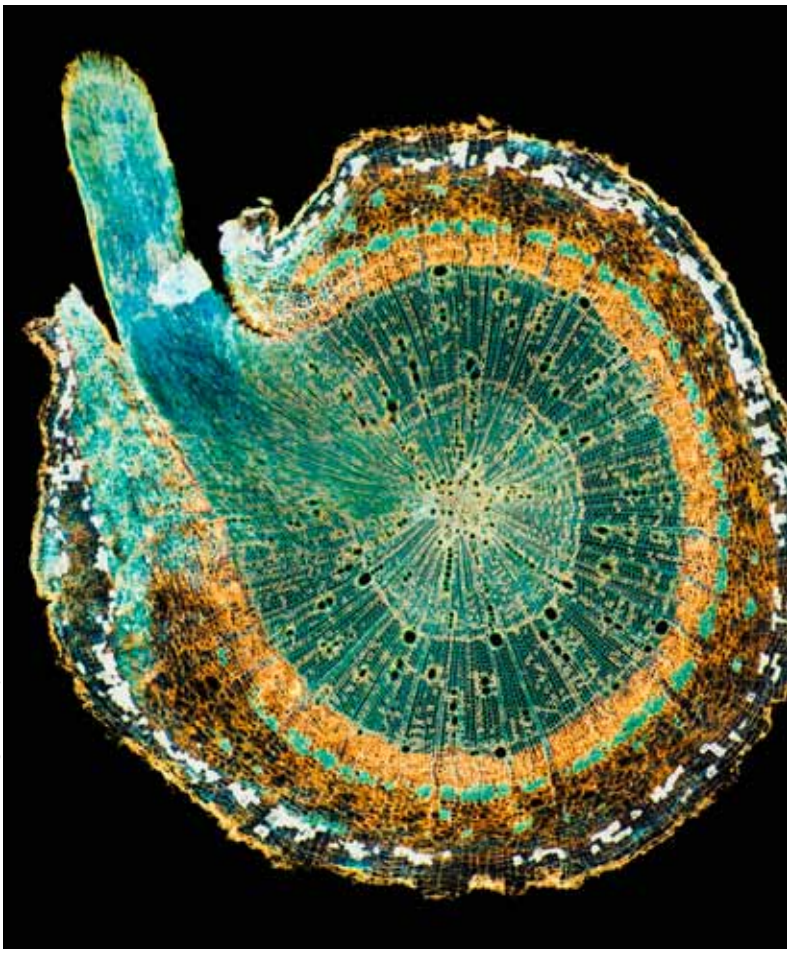
Call for Woodland Owners and Managers to Take Part

The University of St Andrews requests *Living Woods* readers' assistance in studying management of invasive diseases and forest pests

Academics want to know what you're thinking about how to manage your own woodland – or the woodlands you care for – going forward, in expectation that more pests and diseases are headed our way. To that end, Professor Chris Quine of Forest Research, Prof. Dr. John Healey of Bangor University and the team of the research project FOREMOD (http://www.forestresilience.net/) have produced an online survey that they hope you will agree to complete.

They believe that their survey will be beneficial for all involved, not only researchers and policy makers, but also the forestry community. All information is kept confidential. If you have a few moments to assist, please do.

To the Readers of *Living Woods*:
How will the risk of future tree diseases affect the decision making of woodland owners and managers? A request for your views.



High resolution light photomicrograph of ash tree root cross section

©Malcolm Park microimages / Alamy Stock Photo

In recent years, pests and diseases from around the world have severely affected several tree species in Britain, and others are likely to arrive in coming years. Many woodland owners and managers have started to think about how to move beyond just responding to each disease after arrival and instead plan for longer-term resilience of woodlands to a range of possible threats. Such choices are the focus of the research project FOREMOD (http://www.forestresilience.net/) being carried out by a consortium of universities and Forest Research, funded by the UK government. Here we introduce the project and request your views.

The focus of the project is to improve understanding of the decisions which woodland owners and managers make in the light of their knowledge of tree disease risks, and their particular objectives in management. The information generated by this research will help woodland owners understand the economic consequences of different management options. It will also inform policy makers about how different incentives would best encourage woodland owners to make the decisions that most reduce future tree disease risks.

We hope many woodland owners and managers will be willing to participate in this research as this will help us get the strongest possible evidence on which to base this advice. Participating will not take long, will entail no long-term commitment and will be strictly confidential. We are asking you to take part in a 'choice experiment' to find out your preference between pairs of management options that differ in their conditions. The more people who take part the stronger will be the evidence.

To take part in this survey you simply need to enter this address into your browser: http://tinyurl.com/forestmanagementsurvey.

Please also get in touch if you would like to participate in the project in other ways, for instance by advising on what woodland management alternatives we should compare in our economic modelling.

Contact Oleg Sheremet (ois2@st-andrews.ac.uk) for more information about the choice experiment or Morag Macpherson (mfm@cs.stir.ac.uk) about any other aspect of the project.

Chris Quine, Head of Centre for Ecosystems, Society and Biosecurity, Forest Research
John Healey, Professor of Forest Sciences, Bangor University

Brookhouse Wood

Like a woodland creature, **Will St Clair** prepares for the winter season

As I write this, the last of our guests for the year are on the train, chugging their way back to London and their lives. The yurt, the hobbit house and the workshop are now officially closed for the winter.

For the first time, I am able to stop and reflect on our extraordinary first summer at Brookhouse Woods. So much of our time here has been made up of new experiences that time has seemed slower somehow, like it does for children when a single year goes on forever. We have learnt many lessons, and our ideas have changed and developed, but overall I can savour the fact that we have achieved what we set out to do in our first year, and next year's projects are well underway. I've scheduled the courses for next summer, done the technical job of updating the website and allocated time for demonstrating at shows and festivals. The year ahead is ready to unfold, but before then, there's our first winter here.

The weather is changing quickly, and I suddenly must scurry around with the other woodland creatures, storing up enough energy for the cold months ahead!

As the winter draws in, I am once again reminded of how much more involved I am in my environment here in the woods, and how much preparation is needed for simple things like fuel for warmth and cooking. Back in London, when winter approached and we felt the chill, we simply adjusted the temperature gauge on the wall, and lo and behold, the house became warm! Here at Brookhouse Wood we must cut down a tree, process it, dry it, and transport it to the stove before it will produce warmth. Luckily, there is enough seasoned firewood on the farm to see us through this winter, but we are starting to prepare the wood for next winter already. I processed most of the firewood for the workshop this year in April with volunteers on development week, and by the end of the season it was just starting to get dry enough for an open fire. It was often a struggle to work with when most meals were cooked on it and so much of its energy was wasted getting rid of the moisture.

At the end of the summer, Paul and Richard (some friends from the wonderful horticultural charity Grounded Ecotherapy in London) came to stay for a few days to help built a big new log shed at the back of the workshop. We got the job done and made a good start filling it with firewood for next year. This is a process that will be repeated over the winter as we will soon expand our operation to seven holiday units spread over three separate areas of the woods, each needing its own access to dry firewood. Last summer, I spent many hours playing catch up, trying to stay ahead of our guests' need for firewood small enough for the stove in the yurt or dry enough for inexperienced fire makers in the workshop kitchen. As Mike Abbott commented when he saw the new log shed, perhaps we should take on Lars Mytting with a book called "Herefordshire Wood" about the art of finding an excuse to build a new log shed.

Over the last month or so, since the teaching months ended, I have really felt the absence of the bustling creative buzz in the workshop when it is full of course members and volunteers. I'm glad the workshop will have a new purpose for the next few months as the timber framers arrive to start work on the new tree houses. Of course I am grateful for the period of rest, but I am excited to discover how our first winter at Brookhouse Woods seasons us, and to see what lessons we will learn for next winter.

willstclair.co.uk

Ancient Woodlands

Derek Niemann's new book chronicles the ancient woodlands we have lost and celebrates the champions of those that remain

When Derek Niemann was a child, his father took him for long walks in the woods. He had come from Germany, growing up surrounded by a woodland that was 'like something from the Grimm Brothers', remembers Derek. 'He tried to teach me names of things, but of course I couldn't remember any of them.'

Nevertheless, Derek's time in the woods with his father has had a profound and lasting effecting. He has built a career working for conservation and nature organisations and writing about the natural world. Now a freelance writer and editor, living with his wife Sarah, also an accomplished writer, editor and photographer, he has published several books and writes the *Guardian*'s 'Country Diary'. In October his superb new book *A Tale of Trees: The Battle to Save Britain's Ancient Woodland* was published. He does credit his father's influence. 'Once you've been taken to the woods with someone like that, you fall in love. For a child, it's the ideal playground.'

A Tale of Trees is an authoritative, fascinating story of Britain's ancient woodlands, their complexity, their history, their terrible destruction and the stories of the people who recognised their irreplaceable nature and worked to save them.

'It's interesting that when you speak with people, they are likely to say that they don't remember ancient woods being lost,' Derek says, 'People remember a particular elm being lost, but don't remember a wood being there.'

Yet in the last generation, half our ancient woodlands *were* lost. 'Totally gone,' he says sadly. 'But in the 1920's, 1930's, and 1940's, people saw ancient woodlands as nonproductive land so they were grubbed up and completely obliterated.' In his book, Derek has the grace to treat the destroyers even-handedly and without a hint of the judgment that modern people sometimes visit on our benighted ancestors. 'I think it's very important to be respectful and to see why they did what they did. It was all within the context of their time. Though there *were* little rebellions along the way. When some foresters were directed to remove broadleaf woods to make way for conifer plantations, some resigned their Forestry Commission work rather than cut down the oaks they'd planted in their youth.'

'Since then, of course, there's been a great transformation in attitudes,' Derek goes on. 'Of course, everyone knows of Oliver Rackham who did so much, but he really was hopeless at negotiation. He needed someone who could *talk* to the various organisations and that man was George Peterkin. I believe Peterkin is dreadfully underrated and undervalued.' Certainly lesser known. A quick google search for Rackham reveals pages of biography, journalism, a wikipedia entry, photographs. Do the same for George Peterkin and the results are patchy at best.

'He worked for a part of the government [predecessors of Natural England] that did natural research and which were not in accord with the view of the Treasury. He was very, very canny, able to talk to people, to ask 'Why do you do it this way?' and then to listen. He was excellent at negotiating and seeing other points of view and gradually, one by one, the people he had to convince would come around and say, 'You're right." It is because of Rackham, Peterkin and many others chronicled in the book that we now as a nation understand much more about these precious places and cherish them, though they remain under threat.

Even now the government is ignoring its own opinion that ancient woodlands are irreplaceable and negotiating offsets that will certainly not make up for the more than 60 ancient woodlands that are due to disappear if HS2 continues its planned path of destruction.

Yet Derek remains optimistic. 'Maybe we can't completely solve this, but we can tackle these things one by one. We are facing a humongus problem, but I know we can come up with solutions.'

A Tale of Trees: The battle to save Britain's ancient woodland
by Derek Niemann
pub Short Books Ltd
rrp £14.99

Ground control

An excerpt from Derek Niemann's *A Tale of Trees: the battle to save Britain's ancient woodland*

We met Graham the Warden for the first time in Waresley Wood last summer, and I remember standing on the bridge and looking out over an ocean of flowering field beans. My wife and I were taken to the southern edge of the wood, the outer limit, with only a shallow ditch separating us from open farmland.

'This is the critical bit of the wood, always the highlight of my walk when I come to this,' he said, with what I detected was a trace of grim relish. 'I bring visitors to this point and I say to them, "here we are, in the middle of the wood."' Graham raised his finger like an Old Testament prophet and pointed to a hedge way off in the distance. He drew an imaginary line from right to left, as if he was tracing along that thin green line, and said, 'That marks the old boundary of the wood.'

'Oh my goodness!' exclaimed my wife, looking out over the vast expanse of beans. Graham's showstopper had worked again.

Over the winter since we first met Graham, I have looked at a lot of ploughed fields, the ghosts of woodland past, and I am looking at one now, standing in that same place where we gazed out over the field last summer, their sweet smell mingling with the wood-bound scent of trailing honeysuckle. Could the huge expanse that the Mear family call Woodland Field not grow trees again? Could the wood reclaim its own from fertile land? If only it were that simple.

I have feet of clay: when I stand here in the wood, the earth a metre beneath my boots is identical to the tractor-chewed claggy soil ahead of me. The difficulty for those trying to recreate woodland lies in reconstituting that first metre-thick band of earth that is so thin yet so fundamental.

About 2-4,000 years after the last glacial period – we are talking perhaps 8,000 years ago – the soils in Waresley Wood settled into their present state. On top of the clay cap, laid down when dinosaurs walked the earth, and on top of millions of years of wind-blown dust, the forested earth had taken on its own character, formed according to the following recipe:

ANCIENT WOODLAND SOIL
(Serves numerous trees and characteristic plants)
Ingredients
Dead leaves (billions)
Twigs and small branches
Plants
Worms

©Andrew Darrington / Alamy Stock Photo

Fungi
Micro-organisms (including mites)
Dead foxes, badgers, stoats, weasels, mice, voles, birds, etc
Caterpillar poo (and poo of everything else)
Scatter leaves, twigs and branches over surface and allow to stand. Let worms, fungi and micro-organisms break them down. Add other ingredients and repeat breaking down process for roughly 8,000 years.

All this time, the soil in Waresley Wood had built up relatively undisturbed. Woodsmen cut down trees, but they did not dig them up by the roots, so there was very little mixing up of the layers of deposition. The odd earth bank dug by villagers and the excavations of a badger sett would make little difference to the overall stability of the woodland floor, an established, settled habitat.

Nature's composting did certain things to the soil. The boulder clay of the farmed fields around Waresley Wood is slightly alkaline, with a pH of about 7.8.

Waresley's plants are nourished by the remains of their ancestors – the dead vegetation producing mildly acidic soil with a pH of about 6. Over time, the soil in the settled wood became less fertile: as trees were felled and removed, and coppiced bushes were cut and their stems taken away, the levels of nutrients – nitrates and phosphates – began to fall, and continued to fall during more than a thousand years of human exploitation.

Situated on a plateau equipped with a giant clay pond liner, Waresley Wood retains water. It's damp or worse for up to ten months of the year; more in a wet summer: no wonder this land was left as woodland by the Saxon farmers. The gloopy mud on paths like linear buffalo wallows caused the daughter of a friend to question why she had left London for the country, and the lady who turned up in the car park the other day wearing little suede boots with gold-tipped tassels, to look aghast when we suggested that such footwear might not be quite *de rigueur* off piste.

Any plant grown in waterlogged soil will discover to its cost that oxygen diffuses through water to its roots 10,000 times less effectively than through air. But that is not what kills plants in a wood – it is the chemical reaction that causes otherwise inorganic and harmless iron and manganese compounds in the soil to become soluble and poison the plants. The wood is often at its wettest in April and May, drenched by winter rains, but not yet drained by the transpiration of billions of leaves. And that is just at the time when spring flowers are in bloom.

Oxlips are great survivors of such conditions. They can sit for two months at a time in completely waterlogged soil and they can tolerate its active metal compounds, while dog's mercury, the dense and prolific woodland plant that might otherwise overwhelm it, dies off. We know, without ever having seen it, that the huge part of the wood to the south that was lost in the 1970s would have been one of the soggiest parts of all, because it was said to be the best place for oxlips. But oxlips cannot survive the plough.

A single ploughing destroys all. It mixes the clay, the silt and the humic layer in one great, undifferentiated mass. Historically, minor damage could be repaired, in time. Long ago, farmers might claim more land for their crops by 'assarting', felling the trees and bushes at the edge of a wood and ploughing the virgin soil with a light cattle- or horsedrawn plough that barely raked the surface.

The 200-year-old enclosure map for Waresley shows three sticking-plaster strips on the side of the wood labelled as 'stockings'. These strips had been cleared for farming some time before ('stocks' meaning tree stumps) and were, by late Georgian times, naturally regenerating. But even now, more than 200 years later, the one remaining stocking

has a slightly different composition to the rest of the wood, still lacking flowers that are prevalent elsewhere.

The ditch at my feet tells yet another part of the story. On other sides of the wood, the boundary is marked by humped banks, the soil shovelled up in medieval times to keep foraging pigs and other livestock out during the growing season. But in 1973, farmer Stephen Mear wanted to dry out the field he had newly 'reclaimed' from the wood and keep it dry. So this steep-sided ditch in front of me now was dug as a drain, part of a network to ensure that the winter rains would soak away from his fields. Any present-day attempts to restore the wood on this land would involve blocking the drains and bringing back the water.

In March, an elderly dog walker in the car park told us we needed some good drains in the woods to get

rid of the puddles. No, sir, the wetness is exactly why the wood and its oxlips have survived, and exactly why it is so special today. Lose the water and you will lose the very essence of the wood itself.

The older fields beyond the wood may still contain traces of the pulverised bones of soldiers of the Napoleonic Wars and the guano of Chilean seabirds. The battlefields of Europe and the seabird breeding cliffs of South America were plundered in the nineteenth century to fertilise crops for an expanding nation. Our fertilisers today are more targeted, and more effective at boosting soils deficient in chemicals. Not always that targeted: wind and rain have blown fertiliser spray into the north-eastern corner of the wood, and those arch-invaders, stinging nettles and goosegrass, have crept in to exploit the enriched soil and overwhelm the ancient woodland plants such as primroses, which cannot compete with well-fed, fast-growing opportunists.

For more than 40 years, the soil of Woodland Field has been drenched in fertilisers, year after unfailing year. It would be perfectly possible to plant trees there and watch the flowers grow beneath – a rank harvest of nutrient-hungry nettles, thistles, brambles, hogweed, cow parsley, ivy and goosegrass, thriving in the fertile soil, and mimicking the uniform, standard, predictable character of thousands of plantations just like it. Nonetheless, though it may be impossible to recreate ancient woodland, there may be some merit in secondary, lesser-quality woodland bolted onto ancient woods. It may provide a buffer against the drift of farm chemicals from fields that are hostile to wildlife, a green coat that protects the precious edges from harm.

Not so very far beyond the fertilised fields around Waresley Wood are the green hummocky shapes of another ancient woodland. Roman farmers probably cleared the land of trees between Waresley and Gamlingay Wood about 1,800 years ago. Gamlingay Wood is slowly creeping back to touch trees with its neighbour again. More than a decade since the Wildlife Trust bought a field on the northeast side of it, the wind has done the rest, blowing the trees, shaking the branches, loosening the seeds to fall far out in the field to the west.

This bridge between has a name but no adult trees. Sugley Wood is still open country, filled with skylarks by day and barn owls gliding out for the night shift. Not for much longer. By some kind of miracle, seedlings have sprung from the rough grass: ash in profusion, oak, field maple, hazel. Sallow bushes have sprouted in the marshy, puddled patch at least a hundred metres from the main wood. Black-headed reed buntings flit from branch to branch and, on cold winter mornings, snipe shoot out at the sound of approaching feet.

And on the paths where summer-cut hay from rides in the old wood was laid, there are flowers appearing with poetry in their names; hedge bedstraw, meadow vetchling, bird's-foot trefoil, creeping jenny, germander speedwell. It is a start, but unless human ingenuity finds ways to quicken the process, the transformation of this field towards anything resembling ancient woodland will be measured not in years, but in centuries.

Marriage Contract

The Scottish Woodlot Association brings a Canadian model licensing scheme home, by **Jamie McIntyre**

There is a paradox at the heart of British woodlands – but one which a successful new initiative in Scotland may be able to reconcile.

On the one hand, much of Britain's woodland is undermanaged – Grown in Britain, the organisation working to increase British timber production and supply, puts the proportion as high as 54%. On the other hand, more people than ever are looking to get access to woodland to manage to support their livelihoods, but without success.

Let's look at each of these issues in turn.

Britain's forest cover is pitifully low by European standards, at 13% overall, but even at that level the area of undermanaged woods equates to something over of 1.5 million hectares. Some of this area comprises 'awkward' woods – small, or inaccessible, or with variable timber crops growing on them – and owners might say with some justification that the cost of paying for their management outweighs any likely income generated. However, that lack of management means a huge volume of wood, both woodfuel and better timber, fails to reach market in support of wider local economic activity.

Meanwhile, to the aspiring woodsmen and women looking for land to manage, even such 'awkward' woodlands have capital values far in excess of their potential 'productive' value, making it next to impossible to acquire them to support a forest-related business.

What if there was a way to marry up the former with the latter, for mutual benefit? Well, in Scotland, there is: woodlot licences. This model of woodland tenure has its origins in British Columbia (BC), Canada, where individuals are able to rent parcels of woodland on a long-term basis from a landowner.

Back in 2012, a group of foresters in the South of Scotland, frustrated with the lack of opportunity to work in the woods for themselves, rather than for others, came across this woodland licence model. It was a 'light bulb' moment as it seemed the obvious solution to their problem.

As a result, the Scottish Woodlot Association (SWA) was born – a non-profit distributing co-operative dedicated to rolling out the woodlot licence model across the country.

So what is a woodlot licence, and how do they work?

A woodlot licence is a long-term agreement between landowner and licence holder, which allows the latter to manage an area of woodland productively under a management plan agreed with the landowner. The licence holder is responsible for harvesting and restocking, and is free to use or sell the timber thus produced.

Felling is controlled through an agreed Allowable

Annual Cut (AAC) – the amount of timber that the licence holder may cut annually – and this is used to calculate the rental. Typically rents to date have been just a few hundred pounds per year, making the model accessible to people of all means.

In BC, the landowner is the Crown (ie public land), but in Scotland the outlook is broader and potentially includes public, private, community and NGO landholders. Interestingly though, to date most progress has been made on private land, with landowners quick to recognise the benefits of 'devolving' the management of some parts of their woodlands to someone else, in return for a modest rental income.

To date, the SWA has acted as an intermediary between landowner and licence holder providing reassurance to both parties – most arrangements have worked out remarkably smoothly – but is now exploring alternative arrangements including a direct agreement between landowner and licence holder. The aim is to provide a number of options for those involved, to increase flexibility and better reflect local circumstances.

So who are the new woodlotters? The latest woodlots, established this year on the Speddoch Estate near Dumfries (there are now nine across Scotland), provide a snapshot.

Steffi Schaffler is a horse logger who lives not far from the estate and plans to manage her new woodlot using her own horses. The 14 ha woodlot is ideal for them, as Steffi explains, 'It's a great site for horses, not steep and not too wet. I am looking forward to thinning it, which is what horses are really good for.'

Steffi and her partner recently installed a log boiler in their home, so the poorer quality timber they cannot sell as sawlogs will find a ready home in their firewood stack.

Meanwhile another of the new woodlotters, Mark Rowe, also lives nearby, though in his case actually on the estate (this local connection is typical of most woodlots). Mark runs a mobile sawmilling and general forestry business and will use the woodlot both to support his business and provide for his own personal woodfuel needs. Contributing to both lifestyles and livelihoods is again typical of the woodlot approach.

What of the future? Readers may be aware that land reform is a hot topic in Scotland currently, but the woodlot licence model is that rare solution which appears to appeal to both landowners and land reformers. The potential is thus huge – remember the figures for undermanaged woodland highlighted earlier – and the interest from stakeholders is growing.

The problem, if there is one, is capacity: the SWA is a voluntary organisation funded through membership income, licence fees and some seedcorn funding from Forestry Commission Scotland, which to date has paid for some part-time support to continue development. Dedicated, permanent staff would allow a step-change in activity and real growth of the model (British Columbia has nearly 900 woodlot licences!) – but funding remains a challenge.

More information on the SWA can be found online – there is a website, Facebook page and twitter feed (addresses below) – and if you like what you see, membership is open to all who support the SWA's objects, for a modest £20 annually.

www.scottishwoodlot association.co.uk
www.facebook.comScottish-Woodlot-Association-291892124211784
twitter.com/ScottishWoodlot

The Extraordinary Tree

Stephen Hogbin reflects on a five-year celebration of the significance and influence of trees in the life of his community

The Bruce Peninsula, in Ontario, Canada, lies about 120 miles north of Toronto and is a special place with a unique history. The Peninsula is a UNESCO World Biosphere Preserve with 40% tree cover, about a third of which we expect to lose in the near future due to the emerald ash borer. In fact, destruction has already begun.

I have been working in wood since the 1970s. My experience as an artist woodworker relies on trees as the primary source of material with which to work. Knowing where the tree was felled and was it done appropriately is an essential part of the story I tell clients. Sometimes it is the clients' tree, full of their own memories which are often about family events. The story will last as long as the object I create. The carbon from the atmosphere is sequestered along with the family history lasting for a thousand years. So the expected loss to our woodland inspired me to instigate The Extraordinary Tree Project to help our community consider the fundamental place of the tree in our lives.

Eventually the Project encompassed five years, involved dozens of organisations and partners and hundreds of individuals and I believe we accomplished what we set out to do. The Project concludes in 2017, but I suspect it will carry on for many more as the story is remembered and told. We learned various things along the way, which might interest others contemplating a regional project of this kind.

The Partners

The Extraordinary Tree Project began properly when our local heritage museum, Grey Roots Museum and Archives, decided to become central to the project. The first discussions made it clear that an investigation of the tree would need many different voices, so we sought other institutions in the region with a direct link with trees.

Grey Sauble Conservation Authority manages huge forested properties in the region. They agreed to identify significant trees in the region and run a programme to nominate individual trees with the help of the public. Over fifty trees were nominated eventually and became an exhibition at the Museum. The variety of nominators included; ecologists, artists, tree huggers, construction workers, veterinarians, school children, the elderly, historians, and all genders.

The next partner was the Tom Thomson Art Gallery, part of whose mandate is to exhibit and collect works relating to the land. This past summer, the Gallery presented three exhibitions involving painters, an installation video artist and a sculptor whose work utilised a massive found tree element. They also presented treasured images of trees from their collection. The Gallery reports that visitor numbers rose this year.

The fourth partner was Fanshawe College, School of Landscape Design. In 2015 the students proposed new designs for the regional hospitals to include trees, creating healthy spaces and places for the public and health professionals. The following year proposals were made for "tree houses" at the Museum. The projects were documented and exhibited at the Museum along with the Nominated Trees.

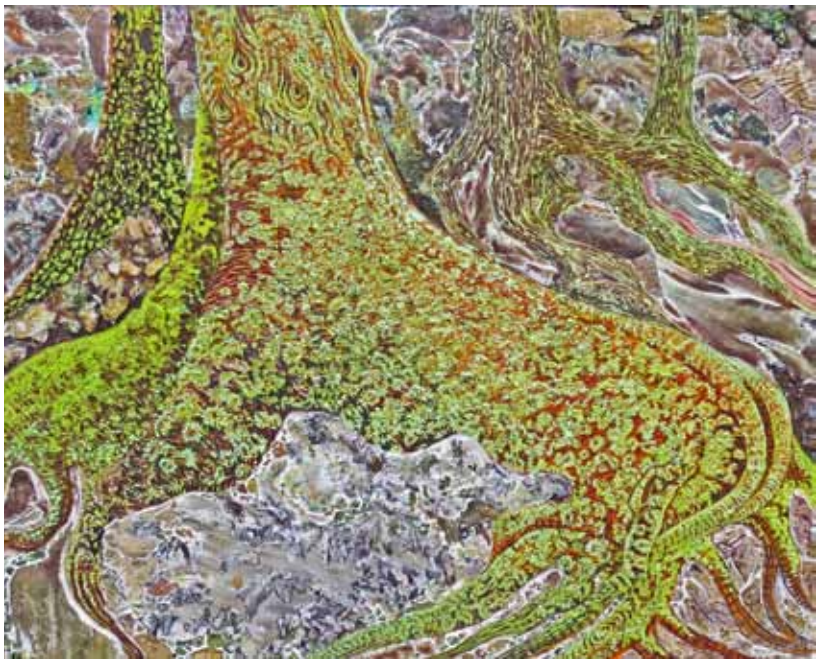
The committee and committed

Our core committee comprised a representative from each partner organization and two independent members who decided that a 'loose fit' model suited them best. As each partner had its own mandate and protocols – and for the sake of simplicity – each of the organisations was initially encouraged to stand alone with their programming of The Extraordinary Tree.

However, there were some connections where skills helped each other and linkages for the tree project were made between the participating organisations where their different skills enhanced one another's programme. The strongest link arose between the Grey Sauble Conservation and Grey

Page 15 Extraordinary Tree, Forest Category, Red Maple with nominator Belle Beverly, who calls it a 'magnificent tree'

Calimari Tree, oil and gesso on board, Lorne Wagman



Roots Museum with the Nominated Tree project that culminated in an exhibition at the Museum and then a sold-out lecture series. This was very effectively promoted through a communications skills specialist with the speakers, public and some excellent graphic designed posters and display cards. If we had had these skills at the start, we may have been more effective at communicating the different branches of the project. Even so, the project experienced an impressive slow growth of interest over the five years.

Businesses from the region were invited early in the process to join in the discussion and some of these businesses became part of the lecture series, exhibiting their products to coincide with the theme of the lecture.

We like to think the lecture series worked well for several reasons: the content of the lectures, we built the programme over four or five years to keep the idea in the public mind in different ways, the cumulative effect of promoting the whole series rather than a single lecture, and a focus that included current issues affecting our trees.

Independent Projects – a part of the whole

There were three exhibitions independent of the core committee. The small but vital Durham Art Gallery presented the works of Rouge Art. They illustrate the cross section of trees in the ground and into the sky in a folk art style. Then came the Collingwood Foundation for the Arts who invited their members to show the tree in a spring exhibition. And at the end of our programme the Southampton Art School invited a group of painters to present their works on trees at the school. Each event appeared as spontaneous and independent. They may have been inspired by our programme or perhaps there is something in the air that has attracted many people to investigate the image of the tree. Is the larger programme worth it? There will be some individuals and groups of people energised by the connectivity.

The Resonance and Response

The poet, scientist, forester, artist and historian approach the tree in different ways making individual trees extraordinary for all of us.

The forester has scientific understanding. The public often has a poetic appreciation for trees and, on occasion, abject ignorance of their value. Most land owners want to know the big picture: what their trees are worth. For some, it may be the cash value only, but increasingly people understand the urgency of global warming and the importance of a healthy environment and a sustainable ecology. There are national and provincial parks and a United Nations Biosphere Reserve in our region. These parks support a

Inverted Tree 1979 by Stephen Hogbin

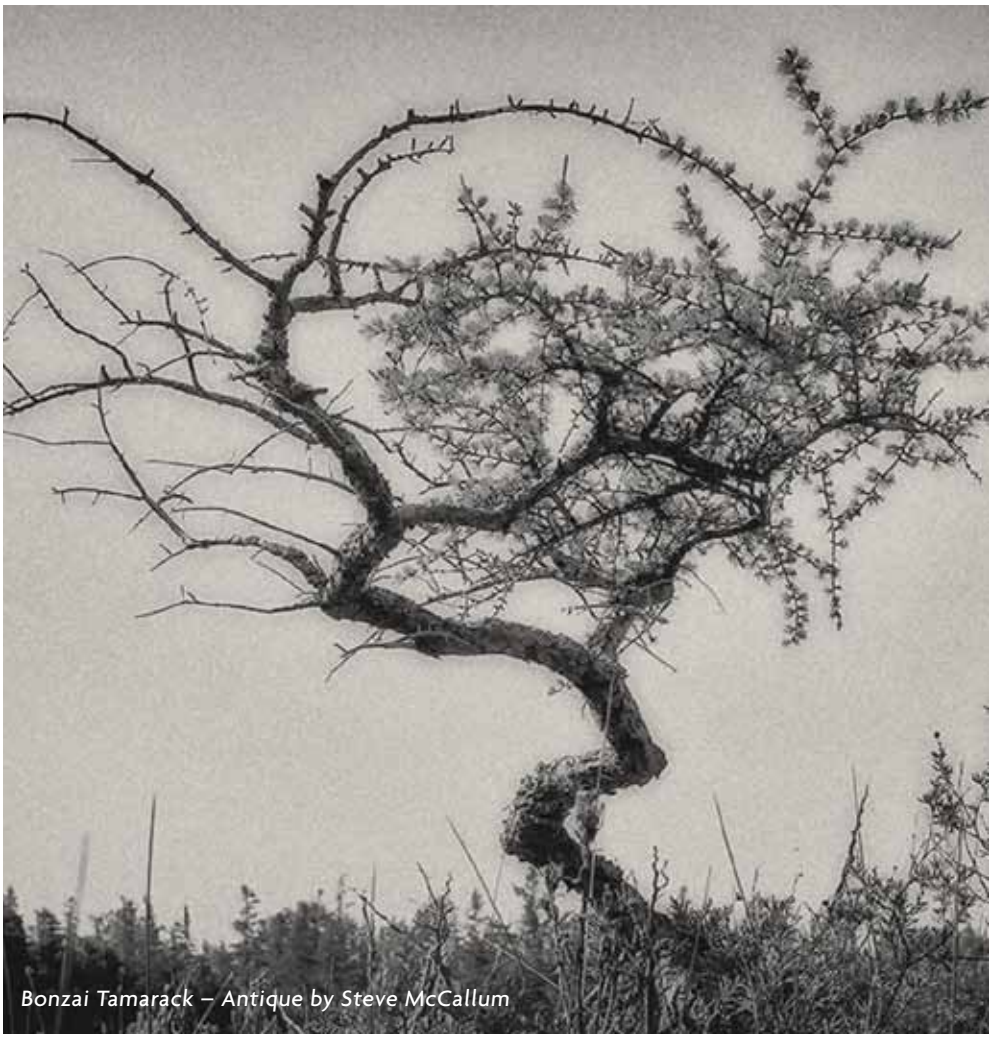
broader view, linking the public to healthy environments helping us to get the public onside in caring for and protecting the trees in all these different places as well as their neighbor's back garden. The Project worked well to bring these various groups close enough that they were able to learn from one another.

Clearly trees are part of human history, the community spirit and healthy environments. The public's response to The Extraordinary Tree Project has been enthusiastic with sell-out lecture series, increased turnout for exhibitions, record sales for artworks of trees and importantly a collective understanding of the social and ecological values of the tree. And there is a tangible result: at the end of the lectures, free tree seedlings were by the door to pick up by those wanting to plant a tree. They vanished to the gardens and farms of the inspired audience.

The rewards come from doing the right thing and bringing clarity to the idea of the project. Discovering new ways to think about issues lubricates creativity and the next step. There is a camaraderie in developing new skills around common problems and finding solutions that are attractive and informative. The interaction of various communities understanding the whole is a challenge. Walkers, runners, snowmobilers, skiers, environmentalists and ecologists all lay claim to the forest paths. Finding a balance that protects the woodland is another reward for all. Fortunately, in the region these relationships are understood and sometimes eagerly debated.

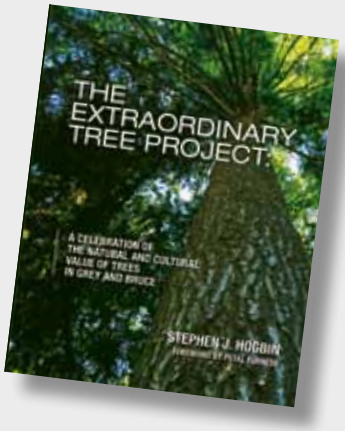
There is not a lot I would do differently in the programme of the Extraordinary Tree. The cultural (social values) and commercial (values of utility) continue to be at loggerheads or isolated in some people's minds. Until the divide can be drawn together as a whole there is a disconnected aspect within the community. It's about balance.

■ For more information about The Extraordinary Tree Project: extraordinaryt ree.com



Bonzai Tamarack – Antique by Steve McCallum

Many of the events relating to the Extraordinary Tree project were documented and published by one of our business partners, the Ginger Press in Owen Sound. We know there is immediate interest in the publication as each Nominated Tree from the Project will be included photographically along with its story. In Part 2, the exhibitions, essays and events are included. The book will be enjoyed over the holiday season as the story of our trees are read and retold – ironically, for some, around a tree cut down for the season. The book takes stock of different perceptions and disciplines concerned with trees. It is diverse and inclusive reflecting the Canadian spirit. Importantly the book is a memory, for in one hundred years, when future generations look back, they will see how we looked after the regions extraordinary trees. Gingerpress.com



Stephen Hogbin is recognized internationally by collectors, educators and professional organizations for his influence in studio wood turning and furniture making. Primarily a studio artist with an inclusive and multi discipline approach, he is also an occasional curator and author. His most recently published book is Hogbin on Woodturning: Purpose Form & Technique. stephenhogbin.com

Ban the Screen

Six great things to do with your kids now, by Environmental Educator and owner/manager of Wild Oak Woods, **Elspeth English**

Here at Wild Oak Woods, we take having fun in the woods very seriously. In fact, we have made it our business -- our 'Families in the Woods' programme offers two-hour activity sessions for holidaymakers in the Dumfries and Galloway Region. As a Christmas gift to your family, children and woodlands everywhere, I'd like to offer some of our favourite activities for woodland fun. Please note that some of these activities require you to seek permission of the landowner. The rest you can do any place, any time.

Find a Rainbow
Red and yellow and pink and green, orange and purple and blue. As you walk through the woods, think of a colour and see who is the first to spot something that colour in the woods. Start with the easy ones like brown, grey, green and yellow, then go through the rainbow. You will be amazed how many colours you can find even in the winter months.

Sound Catching
Walk along in a woodland without saying a word, with your hands up in the air as fists. Listen to the sounds around you as you walk along, and for each sound that you hear, raise one finger or thumb. When you get to ten, do a twirl! Then make your hands into fists again and continue. Walk along for a minute or two doing this, then share what each person heard with the rest of the family.

Pick a Spot
For this one, wear warm clothes and take something comfortable to sit on, like an old jacket. Get each member of your family to pick a spot. Then sit and watch the woodland come alive around about you. For young children, a minute is a great start. Ask them to sit still and use their senses to discover the woodland. What can you see, hear and smell? How does the woodland make you feel? For older children and adults, if you can sit for five minutes or more you will be surprised what you can observe as the woodland comes alive around you.

©Donald bowers / Alamy Stock Photo

Play can be wet even in winter

Build a Den
One of the luxuries of having a woodland managed for people and wildlife is that here at Wild Oak Woods it is easy for us to create large piles of natural materials for families to work with as part of our ongoing management plans. Sycamore removed from our woodland as part of our selective thinning process is a fantastic material to cut in the summer months and build dens with. Even in December on a dry day, material can be found for an afternoon of den building.

The aim of den building is to create a structure using natural materials, designed by group members, which all of the group can get inside. If you can get permission from a woodland owner to use dead natural materials, or if you are fortunate enough to own a woodland

yourself and it fits in with your management plan, this is the activity that I recommend to engage children in woodland play for the first time.

First, have a look around and see what material you can use without causing damage to the woodland. Then, pick a safe spot in which to build. Get everyone involved in bringing material to your building site, discuss possible designs and get to work creating your very own grand woodland den design. You will find that in no time at all you are all having fun and scrambling into your very own woodland shelter. In summer we find that sycamore and hazel cuttings provide plenty of cover for our dens. In winter, an old sheet or tarpaulin is useful to complete your design.

Den building material is always available

Pizza Wreaths

A Christmas wreath decoration using polystyrene from a supermarket-bought pizza as a base has been a successful and popular idea for open days and at-home projects as well. If you can get the landowner's permission, this activity provides a focus for a family walk, engages children with the woodland and inspires a fun craft activity.

Take your family, a pair of secateurs and a bag for a woodland walk in a place where you know you will find holly, ivy and conifer or other evergreen woodland plants. Collect about half a bag of foliage for two children to work with at home. Collect two polystyrene pizza bases and some thin gardening wire, sticky tape and a couple of sharp pencils. Make holes around the edge of the pizza base with the pencils. Stick stalks of the cuttings through wiring or sticking the ends at the back. Continue until you have made a ring of foliage around the outside of the circle, then decorate with glue and glitter and add a Christmas message in the middle. Hang on a wall or door as part of your Christmas decorations.

Glitter Pinecones

This idea may be familiar to many of you reading this article, but having worked in environmental education for twenty-five years, I know that this is an activity that young ones never tire of. It has brought a smile to the face of many, many children and adults I have taught over the years. Go for a walk in the woods and collect pinecones. If you can find a walk with a number of different species of conifer, this works best. It's often possible to find larch, Scots pine, Sitka spruce and even Douglas fir cones in an hour's walk in a local forestry plantation.

Take the cones home and lay them out to dry in a warm, airy space like the hearth of your fire. Find some coloured wool or ribbon or thin string and tie it around the bottom of the cone. Use a glue stick or pva runny glue and a paintbrush to put a small amount of glue all over the cone, then sprinkle on the glitter. If you do this in an old plastic tub it stops the glitter going everywhere. Hang your glitter cones on the Christmas tree and enjoy!

Opportunity Knocks

Elspeth English has too much land and not enough people

On the edge of the Stewartry National Scenic Area in Dumfries and Galloway lies the hidden gem we call Wild Oak Woods (WOW). All but forgotten by modern forestry and agriculture for the last forty years, WOW covers 58 acres of woodland and wildflower meadows with stunning views and fantastic biodiversity. The site is managed for wildlife and people and will in the next few years provide a demonstration forest garden, renewable energy sources and a twelve pitch eco-campsite. Holidays at WOW will give visitors the opportunity to experience nature up close and personal and we hope to create a symbiotic relationship between what is effectively a wildlife reserve and some sustainable small businesses.

Here at Wild Oak Woods, we realise that we are in the fortunate position of having more land than we need and that there are opportunities here for people with similar aims to be involved in the project.

Wild Oak Wood's wildflower meadow

Leasing land for grazing and organic vegetable growing/forest gardening

We have about five acres of meadow that would benefit from light grazing by sheep or horses, and we would be happy to provide a site for the production of organic vegetables. Are you interested in creating an organic smallholding/commercial forest garden/market garden business which would produce food for the local market? We are interested to hear from you.

Leasing wood yard and shed to create a business providing craft products, firewood and charcoal

We have a yard with hard standing and a 20 foot x 30 foot shed with electricity which, ideally, we would like to see used as a base for a woodsman/craftsperson interested in using wood from the site for make craft products for the tourist market and firewood and charcoal for the local market. We hope to restructure our 35 acres of woodland over time to include seven acres of rotation oak/hazel/ash coppice. There is also a tiny house in the yard which has been used as a site office and which should be available in 2017.

If you might be interested in any of the above opportunities at Wild Oak Woods or have some other idea that you would like to discuss, please email me, Elspeth English, at elspethenglish@live.com, visit our website at wildoakwoods.co.uk, search for Wild Oak Woods on facebook or give Elspeth a bell on 07747042197.

Elspeth English at Wild Oak Wood

foragelondon.co.uk

Sharing Traditions

Matthew McCoul's American Facebook group is keen to learn woodland management lore

It's November as I write this, and the growing season's pretty well over at Black Earth Farms here in southeastern Michigan. A few kales and cabbages haven't gotten the memo yet, but in all that phase of farm life is winding down. The farmers markets have closed for the year, the leaves are leaving their trees in a final splendid blaze. Most of the year, we're a little island of flowers, vines, walnuts, mulberries, and vegetables of every kind set amid the sea of corn, soy, and wheat that comes in waves around us.

This isn't a life I expected when I was younger. When my family moved to the country at age 10, I found it incredibly boring. In my defense, what we call "the country" here is soy and lawn with little interruption and that is boring. And yet, as one thing led to another, here I am. My day is spent working with USDA grants for sustainable agriculture and forestry, running an online community devoted to UK woodland practices in North America, poring over countless books and articles and websites on the permaculture, ecological restoration, and sustainable systems.

Every day I encounter others who feel the same; they never expected to be doing things like that either. Real understanding of our environment is building globally at an incredible rate, and it shapes our entire world view. It shapes what we value and what we do.

There's still a lot of work to be done. The earth isn't black here at Black Earth Farms. It's grey and dense. Compared to the massive commercial fields that surround us, our two acres seems barely a farm. My 'woodland' is made up mostly of saplings and markers where we'll be putting in more. Restoration will take time, dedication, and a plenty more learning. There's even a lot to learn from you, out there in the UK reading this.

You see, the area wasn't always flat and bare like this. In 1830 vast ancient woods still sprawled uninterrupted across my home state of Michigan tip to tail. It's a happy accident that Michigan is just a hair larger than the UK, making for an easy comparison. Imagine the whole lot of it, an endless stand of towering giant trees, some hundreds, some thousands of years old. Each one just part of one generation in a lineage that began at the end of the ice age. They're the backbone of an ecosystem, millions of life forms move throughout them. They're as dwarfing as a mountain and as ever-present as the sky. They're the rule, not the exception. They're where the grass would be and the concrete would be. They're shoulder to shoulder across all of it. They're it. You'd have to flee to France just to escape the one continuous forest.

Then, nothing. By the 1920's, not even a full 100 years of commercial logging, the state had been clear-cut. Upper peninsula, lower peninsula, all of it.

To be here, reading a magazine dedicated to the love of the woods, I suspect you share some of the great sense of tragedy I feel at this loss. When someone levels an ecosystem the size of a nation, whether you view it with awe or dismay, something becomes clear: this can't continue. It's been logged. There's no more to log.

It's not all a sea of stumps, corn, and suburbs. Trees have returned, with new forests spanning a little over half the state. But these forests are fledglings. I've lived here all my life, and never seen an old growth forest. Of the roughly 130,000

square kilometers of forest in Michigan, a mere 180 are old growth. That's less than 0.1% of a state that boasted nearly 100% not long ago.

These new forests are a different ecosystem. They're overcrowded, densely shaded. Disease, pests, and wildfire spread quickly. Different species dominate this new playing field while others struggle to survive. Where there was once a long-standing tradition of one thing coming and another going, natural patterns leading into one another, it's now a scrambling race to the top where the losers collapse inward on the path back into balance.

The thing about Michigan's story is that it's not really unique. You can find some version of it most anywhere on the continent with trees in its past. There's been a fight to stop this unsustainable relationship growing stronger since we started shouting, 'Save the trees,' in the 1960's, but that fight to stop something terrible has to be coupled with a will to build something better.

That's the question on the table for environmentalists across the world right now, not just permaculturists like me. What kind of relationship with the planet can we build? I think it's only fitting to learn from people across the world when trying to answer a question that broad in scope.

A lot of the learning experience now plays out on the internet where asking questions across the globe is a few minutes' effort. Need to know what Masanobu Fukuoka was growing in Japan? Ask the internet. Wondering about Sepp Holzer's mountainside woodland farm in Austria? Same. It's the height of the information age. If you want to know something it's just a matter of knowing where to search. There's books for sale, eBooks for viewing and download, articles, online communities, forums, free classes, archives, videos, contact lists. The communities and forums especially are treasures. How often do you stumble into a room full of experts on a relatively arcane art, all willing to share their knowledge with you?

About a year ago, I discovered the UK Hedgelaying and Coppicing group on Facebook. It's a few hundred people all gathered to talk the trade. At the time, despite some talk in permaculture circles about traditional UK woodland management techniques going on in North America, we had no such group. With 570 million people across the US and Canada, surely there had to be *someone* interested in discussing this. I started a group of my own on whim, 'Coppicing, Pollarding, and Hedgelaying North America' with the idea that if I could get at least 50 people together all talking we could get some real conversation going.

Now, roughly 11 months into existence we've already reached 1500 members and growing, eclipsing the UK group and leaving my early goal of 50 in the dust. Interest is strong here; we've taken a look at what you do and we like what we see. We've got experts and authors like Dave Jacke and Ben Falk to join in on the discussion, and drawn in a few people from as far outside North America as Australia, the Netherlands, and the UK. Even with those resources, where interest is strong expertise is still lacking.

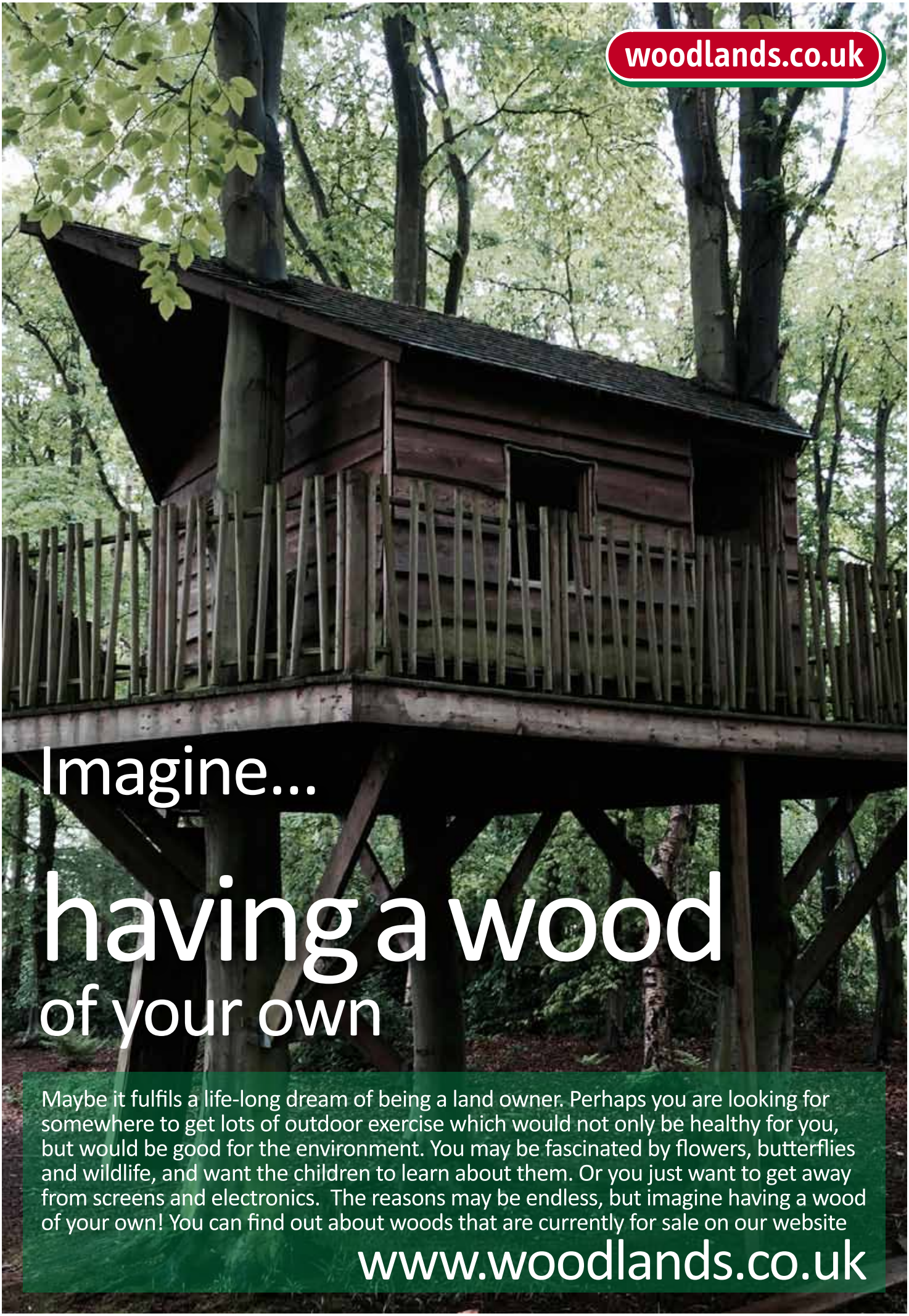
> **'We've taken a look at what you do and we like what we see'**

This is where you come in. The UK has a woodland tradition stretching back far into the distant past. The collier at work, the copse from which he harvests, pollards for tree hay to feed livestock, fences of split chestnut or even living trees laid and woven together into fences bearing fruit. Tools, food, housing, more, all from a sustainable wood that the woodsman calls home. It's a farm of a very different variety than the flat, monotonous fields so prevalent around me and all of those things have a place in woodland management far outside the UK. You may know things worth sharing, never realizing there were thousands of people who wanted to hear them. I'd like to invite you to come on out to Coppicing, Pollarding, and Hedgelaying North America and chat with us here on this side. We've got a lot to learn from you and a lot more to learn when we go to apply it to our own climates. Maybe you'll make some friends while you're out there – we all have something in common. Your knowledge is of great value to the world.

The UK's set of traditions are just one among countless others with something to teach. In our design at Black Earth Farms, we're employing hugelkultur mounds like Sepp Holzer's in Austria, chestnut coppices and a blackthorn hedge like the UK, raised gardens in wet areas borrowing from the chinampas of Mexico, all tied together with permaculture design principles founded in Australia.

Even with a troubled past, and not just in North America, there's a lot of good going on globally. As we start to discuss it all in new ways across ever greater distances I hope to see you around. There's a lot to be gained and a lot to be saved by putting our heads together.

■ Go to facebook.com and search Coppicing, Pollarding, and Hedgelaying North America


woodlands.co.uk
Imagine...
having a wood
of your own
Maybe it fulfils a life-long dream of being a land owner. Perhaps you are looking for somewhere to get lots of outdoor exercise which would not only be healthy for you, but would be good for the environment. You may be fascinated by flowers, butterflies and wildlife, and want the children to learn about them. Or you just want to get away from screens and electronics. The reasons may be endless, but imagine having a wood of your own! You can find out about woods that are currently for sale on our website
www.woodlands.co.uk

Now the trees can

Want to explore the woods? There's an app for that. **Charlotte Fleming** investigates

An artist, an idea and 365 wooden axe-head sculptures led to the creation of Britain's first community woodland. It was 1987 when sculptor and poet Tim Stead and a group of friends used funds from the sale of the specially-created axe heads along with some grant monies to purchase Wooplaw Community Woodland near Galashiels in the Scottish Borders. (One of the wood's four sections is named Axehead Wood, partly in honour of the sculptures.) Now the innovators at Wooplaw Community Woodland have very likely scored another first and brought their education and outreach efforts right up to date with the creation of Wooplore, the first woodland teaching app in the country.

The 20-hectare woods are owned and managed by the Wooplaw Community Woodland charity, a group of volunteers who organise a variety of activities and monthly events. One of their main aims is to keep traditional woodworking skills alive. I came across them demonstrating the use of the pole-lathe and carving shrink-pots at this year's Peebles Wood Fest. They organise training courses in rural skills in the wood, as well as Halloween and Christmas parties for kids. The woods are open to other groups and are regularly used for events as diverse as music, 'art in the forest', wildlife studies, camping and school visits. They're also popular with local dog-walkers and people who just enjoy getting out into woodland.

So there's a large number of people spending time at Wooplaw and the committee thought that some of them might want to learn more about the woods than they could discover by just looking around. While the wood's website makes available an astonishing amount of archive information, it's hard to carry that into the wood when you're visiting without phone or wi-fi connection.

With these thoughts in mind, the committee chose to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the purchase of the woods, in 2012, by creating an app that people could take with them when visiting the wood. They approached Wendy Ball, the owner of Locus Focus, an app development

speak

'Otters', a Wooplore app marker in Wooplaw Woods

company that specialises in creating historical, cultural and natural heritage trails. Wendy also creates the trails in other formats, such as leaflets and audio tours.

Wendy, along with her technical partner William Finlayson, designed and engineered the Wooplore app, which can be downloaded from her website, from the Wooplaw Community Woodland website via a link, or from a router in the car park at the woods themselves. The full app is available for Android, but the audio version can be downloaded to any MP3 player, iPhone or iPod. A picture trail is also available for iPhones. The app works off-line, so you don't need a mobile signal to use it.

It works like this: markers are dotted around the Wooplaw woods on trees and man-made structures. Words on the markers refer to pages on the app. Click on a word and you can read the text or listen to an audio track of one of the volunteers talking about an item: wildlife regularly seen in the area, a special tree, or whatever else the marker refers to. For example, in 'Day One' founder member Donald McPhillimy talks about the opening ceremony when they bought the woods. 'Auroch', narrated by Bob Stock, discusses an art event when a group of people created a sculpture from interesting wood found nearby.

Other pages tell of otters and damselflies, poetry, volunteering, Wooploft (a cabin on stilts designed by local primary school pupils), and a wedding held at Wooplaw. In other words, there's a wide range of information available to visitors, plus a living archive of material from the people who bought and have worked in the woods. It was a huge undertaking by a large number of volunteers, and all are agreed that it was worth the effort.

The main reason for the creation of the Wooplore was to educate and inform visitors to the woodland. Has the app made a difference to the number of people visiting or volunteering in the woods? The jury's out on that question. Wooplaw Woods are accessible to, and used by, many individuals and groups; short of installing a turnstile (neither feasible nor desirable), it's hard to tell whether numbers have increased. The app has been downloaded about 65 times from the Google store, not bad for such a site-specific app, but there is no count of the number of times it's been downloaded from the router at the woods or how often it's been used. Volunteer numbers inevitably rise and fall from one event to another and no research has been done to see whether new people are turning up because of the app or for some other reason. But as I said, that wasn't really the aim.

Two concerns arose once the app was created. The first is that people often leave their phones behind when they go to the woods, limiting the app's use to them. The second is that it's designed more for adult visitors than for kids. In response, Wooplore already has a real-life offspring, the Treats and Treasures map for young visitors, designed by Wendy Ball and aimed at younger users of the wood.

The Treats and Treasures map follows the same trail of markers as the app, separated into three distinct walks suitable for shorter legs. On each marker there's now also a single letter in a different colour from the app-related word. The kids note down the letters they find and rearrange them to make the name of an animal, bird or flower. When they've completed each walk and worked out the anagram they can take the leaflet to one of three local cafés to get a free treat. The cafés keep a stock of the leaflets and benefit from the extra trade of hungry walkers.

The Treats and Treasures map has been promoted in local schools to encourage kids to get out into the fresh air, take some exercise, enjoy the woods and learn something about the local wildlife. It only came out this autumn, too recently to show any real results, but it is another inspiring creation of the visionary volunteers of Wooplaw Community Woodland.

To find out more about Wooplaw Community Woodland, go to www.wooplaw.org.uk. You can explore the Wooplore app at www.locus-focus.co.uk: click on Projects and then Wooplore. If you're interested in developing something similar for a community wood or other project in your area, talk to Wendy Ball of Locus Focus. You'll find her contact details on her website.

Charlotte Fleming, Creative Director of GreatCopy, is a professional writer who specialises in travel and tourism.

Woodland Gifts for Under the Tree

Thoughtful, fun, beautiful, useful – let our seasonal gift guide inspire you.

1 From **Peter Lanyon**: 'A delightfully simple and elegant nesting box for all your favourite garden birds. Made from sweet chestnut and birch ply. There are two sizes available - the small size suits tits, tree sparrows and pied fly catchers, with the large size suitable for house sparrows, nuthatches and starlings. There is a door in the back for cleaning out last year's nest, and each box comes finished with a naturally preserving wood oil with UV protection to keep its good looks for many years. Comes with instructions for siting and hanging. Small - £38. Large £45. Can be purchased directly from my website - peterlanyonfurniture.co.uk'

2 Morakniv ELDRIS is a fixed blade pocket knife that can be also be used as a Neck Knife. Stainless Steel blade 2.3" long. Compatible with a Fire Starter. Compact and convenient. Available 5 Fab colours; green, red, black, yellow and blue. £32. Available from the greenwood tool and book specialists, The Woodsmith's Store www.woodsmithexperience.co.uk tel: 0191 252 4064

3 Gransfors Bruk Wildlife Hatchet. Classic small, light and well balanced axe. Designed as a lightweight camping axe but it's thin fine bit means it can be used for small carving work. Many people's first choice for blanking-out spoons. Take in your rucksack, use for lightweight work including felling small pole size trees, snedding and splitting kindling wood. £68. Available from the greenwood tool and book specialists, The Woodsmith's Store www.woodsmithexperience.co.uk
tel: 0191 252 4064

4 From **Robin Wood:** 'These are the three tools you need to get you started in spooncarving, an axe, a hook knife and a straight knife. Some folk like to have several hooks with different curves and left and right handers, I generally only use one right hand open sweep hook for most of my production carving so that is what I have included in this spooncarving tool kit. If you prefer a different hook or are left handed you can simply buy the items individually.

Whilst suitable for beginners these are high quality tools that are also used by top professional carvers around the world.' Cost £95 plus P&P from www.robin-wood.co.uk

5 Automata are whimsical mechanical toys that have a cool, life-like movement when their crank is turned. This flying unicorn flaps its wings and kicks its legs up and down as it moves back and forth, soaring through the sky - bringing your art to life! Great educational kit for unicorn enthusiasts, as a desktop accessory, or science project. All pieces are pre-cut and ready to go, only a ruler and scissors are required. Easy to make in about an hour by beginner model makers.

Natural, untreated wood and plywood.

Finished size is 22cm x 29cm x 30cm high.

Suitable for ages 8+.

The unicorn costs £9.95 and can be ordered via www.classichandtools.co.uk or by calling on 01473 784983. Also available as a jumping horse, soaring dragon, flapping pteranodon or flying pig!

6 With legs that move up and down, this running dog automata runs like the wind as it moves forward and back in a graceful action! Great educational kit for dog lovers, as a desktop accessory, or a mini guard dog. All pieces are pre-cut and ready to go, only a ruler and scissors are required. Easy to make in about an hour by beginner model makers.

Natural, untreated wood and plywood.

Finished size is 14cm x 29cm x 30cm high.

Suitable for ages 8+.

The dog costs £9.95 and can be ordered via www.classichandtools.co.uk or by calling on 01473 784983. Also available as a jumping horse, soaring dragon, flapping pteranodon or flying pig!

7 Peter Boyd has been crafting beautiful works of art from wild trees for many years. His passion is to celebrate the unique qualities of each piece of wood, creating something that becomes a much loved friend as the years pass. Each piece is an original, and can be seen on his website PeterBoydSculpture.co.uk, where you can buy them, or contact him for a unique design commission.

HOLIDAY SHOPPING

8 Mo Bro's XL Beard Grooming Kit is an ideal set or a present for any beardsman. Whether you're new to grooming or already more advanced, this Grooming Kit covers all the essentials that your precious man mane needs: beard oil, balm, soap, comb, scissors, moustache wax and a carry bag. Mo Bro's products will keep your beard clean, moisturised, tamed and will even stop the itch. Available for £19.99 at www.mobros.co.uk or at a pop up stand in Highcross shopping centre in Leicester. See the website for more details.

9 The Blackdown Shepherd Huts people make their beautiful living and working spaces right here in Somerset and the Turnkey Hut is where they really come into their own: oak chassis, steps, cladding, floor, table, storages benches and countertop, Farrow & Ball colours, wood fuel Villager stove, electrics and plumbing and so many high quality details and customising options we haven't got the space to list them all. The Turnkey Hut starts at £25,000 inc VAT and goes up from there, but there are self-finishing options and even self-build options from £3,150 inc VAT for a metal chassis alone. If you need something unforgettable to take to wood fairs, there are towable options as well. It may not fit under the tree, but we don't think they'd mind. For more details, please visit www.blackdownshepherdhuts.co.uk or call 01460 929774.

9

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WIN YOUR OWN SAMURAI SAW!

Visit the Samurai Saws website www.samuraisaws.co.uk to find the answers to the questions below.

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2. What process is used to increase the life of the teeth for up to three times longer than a conventional saw?
3. What are the GSM series saws perfect for pruning?

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Old Saws and Two Wise Men

David Hunter learns to bring a long saw back to life in Dalbeattie, Scotland

We are in a beautiful workshop in west Scotland where, under the careful tutelage of Gavin Phillips and Duncan Hill, I am learning the art of resurrecting a long saw. The brains of the students (five in total) are almost audibly whirring with new and strange terminology. Jointing, knife files, raker gauges are all words that our patient instructors use as they guide us through the process of sharpening Great American and Raker pattern long saws. After a demonstration from Duncan, we are urged to get stuck in. 'It is not rocket science!' Gavin exclaims cheerfully. We don't need a second invitation to up tools and soon the spacious and well-equipped workshop rings with the rhythmic sound of file and hammer on saw.

The workshop pays testament to the passion Gavin and Duncan have for long saws. There are dozens of saws carefully hanging on every available wall space. Peg tooth, M patterns, Great American, Raker tooth, bucking saws, felling saws, they are all here. Some are working tools taken regularly to the woods for the jobs they were made to do. Others will need some love before they are released from the workshop, a tickle with the file here, a tap from the hammer there. The worst ones will first soak in a bath of molasses to remove the rust that has developed after years of neglect at the back of a shed or hanging on a pub wall. Whatever their condition, they can be saved and this forms the crux of the course.

'It is not rocket science,' Gavin repeats, 'Anyone can restore a saw. I would like to see more people just having a go.' Duncan proves the point by purchasing for the course a 5-foot Great American pattern long saw from e-bay. It is set on the worktop, still in its packaging. We unwrap it with the eagerness of excited children at Christmas. Once it is bared on the worktop, Duncan talks us through the saw, its merits and its faults, and bit by bit some of its history unfolds as we guess at the saw's journey to this workshop in Scotland.

He then talks us through the process of how to turn it into a useful tool again. 'Any saw will cut,' he say, 'but it is all about efficiency.' Anything that uses human power needs to be efficient if you don't want to collapse in an exhausted heap at the end of the day.

First is the cleaning. Rust needs to be removed. This can be done either by gentle sanding with a sanding block or BBQ block cleaners (recommend by Gavin). If the rust is really bad, you can try a molasses bath, a 10:1 mixture of water : molasses, which gently lifts the rust without further eating the metal (a risk when you use a vinegar-based solution).

Next you need to take the set (the angle of the teeth) out of the saw with a few (hopefully) deft blows of a hammer over an anvil. Once you have a saw with straight cutting teeth like a line of soldiers on the parade ground you have to level off the tops. Imagine you are taking a series of mountains and knocking off any peaks so that they all sit at the same altitude.

Next comes out the files, the teeth being sharpened one by one. The sharpening is an amazingly focused part of the process and you quickly find yourself in a rhythm, turning old blackened metal back to a smooth, shiny and all importantly sharp cutting edge. I found it extremely rewarding to see new life creeping slowly returning to the saw.

Finally, you need to put the set back in. Imagine your soldiers alternately leaning forwards and backwards. The amount of set is essential: too much and it will jam, too little and it will, well, jam. The numbers are minuscule – the teeth need to move 1/64th of an inch or for the metric convert 0.3969 mm. So basically, not very much.

Then comes the exciting bit. The handle goes back on and you nervously approach the saw horse wondering how your newly-sharpened, set and loved saw will deal with the fresh log sitting in front of it. To my great relief, the saw I was responsible for sharpening sliced into the wood effortlessly and was soon spraying out sawdust into the sunlight shining through the workshop skylight. It was a great moment and one that highlighted the level of tuition offered on the course and that the long saw still has a place in woodland management.

Over a hearty lunch (the food was beautiful) I asked Duncan and Gavin about the long saw and its


©David Hunter


©David Hunter

legitimacy in today's woodlands. They were both very positive, confident that it still had a place.

'Yes, they are slower (than a chainsaw)', but you can still process 'a lot of wood in a day,' stated Duncan. He went onto explain that they are 'relatively safe, start first time, can be used with little training, are plentiful and cheap and run on a cup of tea and a cheese sandwich.'

'If your living depended on cutting wood quickly,' Gavin continued, 'then perhaps they are not for you.' However, if you are not at the mercy of deadlines, it seems that the long saw may well be a good choice. After all, as Duncan explains, they are 'quiet' and 'sociable', perfect in a community woodland project, in an urban area, in a learning environment or simply if you want to work while being able to talk to your fellow woodsmen.

I have to say I share their enthusiasm, and I will be browsing the internet for my own forgotten long saw, and using the skills I have gained from the course to bring it back to life and back to the woods. I strongly encourage you to do the same.

Duncan and Gavin run courses on sharpening long saws from Gavin's home in Dalbeattie, Scotland. www.shedtherapy.com . In 2017 courses run Jan 28, Feb 25 and Mar 25 and then raker-toothed saws Oct 14 and 15th. '

David Hunter is a coppice worker in West Wales where he manages a woodland and helps out at Coppicewood College, a learning centre for traditional coppice management techniques in Cilgerran, Pembrokeshire.

Helper Handles

You may like to try a helper handle on a one-man saw as it can create extra thrust for you or an assistant.

The helper-handle screws down on a short pin or rivet passed through the saw. On better quality helper handles, the rivet will be trapped. But if your rivet drops out you can retrofit one as follows:

Select a rivet ¬– or bolt – of a diameter that just passes inside the helper handle hole. (If you cannot find the right diameter rivet or bolt, you can drill out one side of the helper handle hole to create the passing fit you want.)

Now drill out the other helper handle hole with a drill a half-millimetre bigger in diameter. Keep going a little more to countersink with your bigger
drill into the smaller diameter hole.

Place the rivet in the smaller hole and out through the bigger hole and peen over the rivet-end only so much that the peened rivet end will pass through the bigger hole but be trapped in the smaller hole. The countersink keeps the peen clear of the sawplate.

You can easily buy old saws at car boot sales or on ebay. Even if the saw is rusty, they can be worth getting under £10, especially if the wooden handle is in fair condition with all its fixings and the saw is at least 36" or, ideally, longer.

– Gavin Phillips

Rotatech Chainsaw Chains

Dick White sees Rotatech chains in his future

Having spent eighteen months working with the manufacturer, developing and testing these chains, Northern Arb Supplies now market them under the Rotatech banner, their 'house' name, perhaps most commonly associated with their range of chipper blades.

Rotatech chains are distributed in the UK exclusively by Northern Arb Supplies and although they are actively seeking to widen their distribution network outside of the UK, there are no plans to make the chains available through other outlets within the UK.

Perhaps the most striking thing about the product is the price. Typically a Rotatech chain will come in at no more than half the price (maybe even less) of a big brand alternative (such as Husqvarna, Stihl, Oregon). According to Northern Arb, the fact that they are sole supplier – no 'middle-men' wanting a slice of the cake – is the main reason why they can sell the chains at these prices.

But, although important, price is not the only factor which we users take into account. There is nothing more frustrating than having a task interrupted by equipment failure, and while different types of user will have different views on the price/quality/reliability equation, those who earn their living using power tools will usually be prepared to pay a bit more to have a product they can rely on.

So how do Rotatech chains shape up in use? The chain I tested was supplied in a re-sealable plastic pouch and unfolded into a loop smoothly – no wrestling with untwisting the thing. The chain was lightly oiled and flexed easily at all joints, seeming nice and pliable. (Please be sure to wear sturdy gloves if trying this at home!) I fitted the chain and tightened it up to my usual level of tension.

First job was to cut up and remove a couple of fairly big laurel stems which had come down across the access track at one of the woodlands I manage. One of the benefits claimed for these chains is that they have been "pre-stretched". As is my habit, I always give the chain a bit of a pull when re-fuelling and although there was a little bit of slackness after a couple of fuel-stops, my subjective feeling is that it wasn't as significant as with other makes.

From new, the chain kept its edge well, even though it had to contend with logging-up some very muddy ash which had been lying in a field for several months waiting for the ground to dry enough to allow it to be moved. In common with other makes, after the first few sharpenings, the edge seems to 'go' more quickly – maybe it is the way the cutters are hardened during manufacture or perhaps the repeated heating and cooling of the metal somehow softens it?

So, are Rotatech chains better than other better-known brands? Not particularly. On the other hand, based on my experience, I cannot see that they are worse in any way, which brings us back to where we started: if you have a chain doing the job just as well as any other, but at half the price, why would you want to pay more?

Dick White is a self-employed woodland manager and is also woodlands.co.uk local manager for Cornwall and West Devon.

Biography: Rotatech Chainsaw Chains come in a wide range of specifications and prices. The range includes chains, chain reels, files, bars and oils. northernarbsupplies.co.uk

Got It Covered

Tony Morgan guides **Wilson Irving** through the process of creating a natural leather sheath for his billhook

Does this sound familiar? My billhooks are sharp, my knives are honed, my axes glow with the sheen of years of careful attention. They are protected from damage, however, with old socks and tea towels and pieces of plywood tied up with string.

Having watched Tony Morgan give impromptu leather working lessons at various events over the past year, I found the opportunity to make some leather goods for myself at Coppice Association North West's 'Weekend In The Woods' 2015 too good an opportunity to miss. (Anne decided she would like to have a go and would make a handbag – yes, another handbag.)

Tony uses vegetable-tanned British leather from Scottish cows. This tanning process uses tannins from chestnut or oak bark which bind to the collagen proteins in the hide to make it more resistant to bacterial attack and more flexible, as well. Other methods of tanning use chrome, chemicals or, in the case of buckskin, the animal's brains. Urgh.

Tony offered a choice of two or three millimetre thick leather and a whole new collection of tools appeared: skivers, awls, burnishers, stitching irons and bevelers, which we were to learn to handle over the weekend.

I decided to make a sheath for my billhook. Tony had suggested that we could probably make two or three articles once we had become proficient at the various techniques.

As leather is quite expensive and mistakes in cutting can be costly, the first step was to prepare a pattern. It was worth investing a lot of time in planning my cover, deciding on the allowance for stitching and joining and checking the fit on the tool before marking the final shape on the leather with a scratch awl. I had to consider the construction process, as well, as some areas of the piece would become inaccessible once all the parts were assembled.

When that was done, the leather was then cut to shape and dyed to a deep, chestnut brown. Tony told us that the dye used was an 'institutional' non-flammable one, suitable for use in prisons, hospitals and schools -- presumably to prevent the various inmates or pupils using it for nefarious purposes. As my billhook is an edge tool, he advised including a

welt between the front and back pieces to prevent the sharp edge cutting the stitches.

The process of joining the various pieces by stitching or riveting -- or both -- could then commence. I marked the stitching line on the outside face of my leather and used a stitching iron, which is basically a fork with equally spaced prongs and usually available at 6 to 12 stitches per inch, to mark the stitch positions.

To hold the various pieces of leather in place temporarily and keep them from slipping as I stitched them, Tony advised gluing the sides together with PVA adhesive.

Now came the time to join the various pieces together. A stitching pony, a simple wooden clamp, held between the knees provides a third hand and allows both hands to be free for stitching.

I used a saddler's harness needle, which is relatively blunt, the thread being pierced to lock it onto the needle. You calculate the length of thread you need at about four times length of stitch line plus a little extra, which meant my thread from the main body of the billhook sheath was about 2.40m long, not an easy thing to manage. Following the marks made earlier by the stitching iron, I pierced each hole with a very sharp stitching awl and sewed the seam working from both sides using saddle stitch. The beauty of this stitch is that if one thread is cut or breaks, the whole thing does not unravel.

It became clear that the billhook sheath was too large an undertaking for the weekend, with a lot of time-consuming stitching through two or three layers of 3mm leather, so homework was required. Completing the stitching at home was a bit easier, sitting on a tall chair with bright sunlight. The final oiling and waxing brought out the patina of the leather. The finished sheath looks fantastic, almost too good to use in the woods, and has now proved to be a very practical and even somewhat stylish piece.

Others on the course opted for simpler objects: axe, knife and drawknife sheaths some with riveted fastening rather then the time-consuming sewing I had chosen. Mike, for instance, managed four objects with riveted fastenings and could have made more were it not for a ewe about to lamb early on Sunday afternoon.

Overall, Tony Morgan gave us all a great introduction to leatherwork processes and techniques and we all went home with a number of useful articles which should last a lifetime if well cared-for. I now have more leather to make some simpler axe and drawknife sheaths and hopefully they will be as good as the billhook sheath. I came away with the leather – and the confidence – to do some leatherworking of my own.

Notes:
As well as making objects in leather, willow and wood, Tony Morgan (bodgermorgan.co.uk) regularly teaches courses through The Coppice Co-op (coppicecoop.co.uk).

Wilson discovered greenwood working in 2012 after visiting Sprint Mill, Burneside and attending Woodland Pioneers. He continues to develop his skills through courses and working with coppice crafts people in the Lake District. He is currently making a Clissett ladderback chair.

Weekend in the Woods, organised by Coppice Association North West, will be held on 6 & 7 May 2017. coppicenorthwest.org.uk

Samurai C-330-LH and GC-330-LH saws

Woodland warriors give 'hai' marks to a pair of Samurai saws, by **Johnny Morris**

Whoosh! A neatly cut branch from my catalpa tree whizzed past my ear and crashed to the ground just as I was about to straighten the ladder for the start of the pruning action. 'Sorry!' shouted my friend Topo from up on high. 'This thing is super speedy.'

I was testing out two Samurai style saws and I had enlisted my good friend Raden Topo Wresniwiro to try them while giving my Indian bean tree a much-needed trim. As well as being a trained gardener, Topo is a film actor who is usually cast as the mysterious Asian villain or a wise kung fu master. The Japanese tools certainly suited his oriental style. As he pulled the curved saw from its scabbard, his transformation into suburban Samurai warrior was complete.

It turns out that Topo could get though the unwanted branches in double quick time because of the saw's special 'impulse hardened' teeth. In layman's language this means that the teeth are toughened with intense localised heat that leaves the carbon steel of the rest of the blade very flexible. Allegedly this technique, together with an efficient geometrical design. means that the blade remains sharp three times longer than conventional saws. Samurai Saws are made by Kanazawa, a family firm that has been producing arborist tools since the 1900 and is based in Miki City, an area of Japan that has been mastering metal work since 1600. Plenty of time to perfect their products, then.

Topo found the sturdy (plastic) scabbard useful in protecting himself against the sharp teeth as he clambered in the catalpa. There was only one tricky moment when his belt loop slipped round and he found himself returning his saw to a scabbard swinging right between his legs. Resisting hara-kiri jokes, I closed my eyes and hoped the steely blade had found a safe home.

He liked the pistol grip of the rubber handle and preferred the greater flexibility and lighter feel of the GC-330 over the more solid C-330. (Surely the makers could come up with less robotic labels for these distinguished tools? Even bookcases have names these days.)

With the super sharp tools we whizzed through the pruning job and Topo was set to leave early. 'Just one thing,' I suggested as he headed for the door, 'Best put the tool away in your bag, Topo.' Wearing a Samurai pull saw on your belt to the local pub is probably not a good idea.

Fact box:

Samurai saws are manufactured from SK-5 high carbon steel.

Samurai GC-330-LH comes in two lengths, 270mm (£31.99) and 300mm (£35.99). The saw features a precision ground blade with even taper from the teeth to the back of the blade, meaning teeth do not need to be set. The thinner cut promotes faster cutting. Replacement blades available (£21.99 and £23.99 respectively).

Samurai C-330-LH (£31.99) features set teeth and thicker blade, making it an efficient heavy-duty saw. Replacement blades available (£17.99).

Both scabbards feature flexible, detachable belt loop.

All prices include VAT and postage/packaging.

- www.samuraisaws.co.uk, 07505042382
- www.videoproductionar.com

Topo Wresniwiro is currently appearing as Master Hamir in the new Marvel blockbuster Dr Strange and in gardens throughout southeast London. raden.topo@gmail.com

Packing Heat

Carlton Boyce on some portable classics for cooking and warmth in the woods

If the axe transformed the way primitive humans practiced agriculture (*Living Woods* Autumn 2016), the discovery of fire enabled us to evolve from what was previously an essentially animalistic existence into the sort of social and civilised lifestyle that we would recognize today.

Fire allowed us to cook, widening our diet and starting the process that transformed food from something that was merely a fuel into something to be savoured and enjoyed. It gave our ancestors a focal point around which to gather and share stories. Our history started to be shaped and recorded, orally at first and then by way of cave paintings, an activity, let us not forget, that was only possible because of the light that fire provided.

The warmth that fire provided also enabled humankind to extend our reach into previously inhospitable regions of the world; no longer tied to the warmth of Africa in order to survive, we roamed more widely and started the process of global domination.

So our history is entwined with the warmth and security a fire provides and that process continues even today. For many of us, and I include myself in this, one of the many reasons we look forward to autumn is because it allows us to draw the curtains and light the fire; to enjoy those wonderfully languid evenings when it's too dark and cold to work outside, forcing us to relax with a good book and a glass of something warming as we toast our toes in front of the wood-burner.

Nor is there any reason to deny ourselves that same pleasure when we're out and about in the woods. My wife's favourite job is burning brash in a huge, barely controlled bonfire while I tend to my portable wood-burning stove.

My choice is the Anevay Frontier Stove. Originally designed for use by humanitarian organisations in disaster zones, it's a brilliant piece of design: the chimney comes apart and is stored inside the body of the stove while the legs fold down and lie against the base. The whole thing fits snugly in its own hand luggage-sized bag and can be stored in the boot of your car until your next day in the woods.

Anevay portable Frontier Stove

I also bought the optional water heater, which clips onto the chimney flue and boils water using

heat that would otherwise be wasted, and the nifty little spark arrestor, just in case. All-up, the total weight of the stove and kettle is well under 15kgs, making it easy to schlep by hand deep into woods. Other accessories include a kit to fit it to a tent plus flashing to install it in a shed, increasing its versatility and helping ease the modest purchase price of £165 still further.

Kelly Kettle

It's not perfect. The door needs to be open to draw air in and the flue needs constant fiddling to balance the stove but it's a cheery little thing when it's cold and dreary and you want something to gather round while you fry some sausages for lunch.

If you are looking for something a little more sophisticated, there are other options. Of course, more features will generally mean more weight, which might affect how spontaneous you can be, but the all-singing-and-dancing Anevay Fintan is a lovely thing. At just over £600 and 23.5kgs plus accessories, it's just too darned heavy for me to lug into the sort of places that I enjoy going but, for a semi-permanent location, or if you can get a vehicle to where you need to be, I can see it making an awful lot of sense.

Of course, you can keep it simple and use a tripod over a fire. The DIY enthusiast should be able to fashion something suitable for under a tenner while the rest of us are looking at paying £50 or so on something pre-built. I've been playing with the Petromax Cooking Tripod (which I bought, along with my Anevay Frontier Stove, from ProAdventure in Llangollen) . I have to admit that the kids much prefer cooking on an open fire to using my Frontier Stove.

Speaking of children, you'll need to keep an eye on them no matter what heat source you use, though surely part of the appeal of owning and working in woodland is the opportunities it gives for them to roam far and wide and learn to cope with the sort of everyday dangers modern society wants to insulate them from. Catching wild trout, for example, and then gutting and grilling them for tea remains one of our most vivid family memories and it helped ensure that our children are making the link between the food they eat and the environment they inhabit. The woods are filled with pigeons, rabbits and squirrels, all of which make good eating for those with an air rifle and a healthy appetite for adventure when it comes to choosing supper...

Finally, never underestimate the versatility and practicality of a simple Kelly Kettle. Mine came with a cook set and a pot support, enabling me to use it for cooking as well as boiling water. No, it's not as cosy as an open fire or my Frontier Stove, but if I'm trekking in for miles then it's a quick and easy way to get enough heat to warm frozen fingers and rustle up some hot food and coffee during work breaks.

And remember, none of the above requires you to buy, store or carry fuel. Burning off-cuts and brash from your very own woodland makes them environmentally sound and infinitely sustainable. With care, they should all last a lifetime too, which isn't something that can be said of your DIY superstore barbeque.

www.anevay.co.uk, Frontier Stove from £162 retail. Fintan from £590 retail.
Petromax Cooking Tripod from £50 retail, widely available.
Kelly Kettle from £45 retail, www.kellykettle.com, currently shipping is free.
Accessories are always extra
ProAdventure offers a mail order service, 01978 860605 or www.proadventure.co.uk.

Silky Fox Forester 3000

Donna Cameron discovers an extending pole saw that's light and easy to handle

Not being a chainsaw operator and also wanting the convenience of having a human powered pruning saw around my small woods, orchard and property, I was pointed in the direction of the extending pole saw people, Silky Fox saws. They have everything from small folding pocket saws and handsaws through to ultra long 4m plus polesaws, all with ferocious looking teeth.

I was advised that for medium height use on relatively modest sized trees, that the Forester 3000 would be most appropriate. It is the latest addition to the already very extensive range offered by Silky. The blade is made of impulse hardened chrome plated Japanese steel, that if looked after properly should resist corrosion. As the 3000 suggests, this is a 3m long model with two extensions. There is a 4.5m model available too. Those already familiar with Silky products may be interested to know that the Forester sits between the Zubat and Hayauchi range: longer and stronger blade than Zubat but lighter than Hayauchi.

My initial impression was just how light it was: very important for me unless I can draft in the "heavy labour". Although light and easily manageable in the air, the construction appears very robust and rigid with very easy deployment of the extension. Most of my needs are for fruit tree pruning and general brashing work, so nothing too heavy, and the saw was a breeze to handle despite being able to work well above ground level.

I set to on some birch around the house that is in danger of reaching out to our telephone cable. Bearing in mind that these polesaws should not be used in close proximity to electricity cables. I was relieved to find that the saw was very easy to handle and control. The cutting was light and swift. The ease of sawing was due in no small part to its light weight but also its excellent rigidity and its long and comfortable grip area. I have no doubt it would slice through limbs and branches much bigger than the 50mm I was tackling. The cut left by the teeth was incredibly smooth and I believe this should reduce the risk of subsequent infection to the tree.

Some further points to note are its colour and the blade scabbard: it was easy to see where I had left it and the substantial blade protector will certainly do its job! Lastly I think that it should be possible to fit the handle from the Zubat range to convert it for handsaw use just in case of really restricted access, though this is not explicitly stated by Silky: in all reality I think I shall be able to cope in its retracted length. All in all, the Forester gets an encouraging thumbs up and I am sure it will be a much-used tool around the woods.

Silky Fox Forester 3000, £175 rrp, widely available.

Branching Out

When it comes to identifying the characteristics of any material, I think that the wood of our trees must have one of the widest range of uses that we have in the planet. And as Thomas Hardy illustrates in '*The Self-Unseeing*':

Here is the ancient floor,
Footworn and hollowed and thin,
Here was the former door,
Where the dead feet walked in.

She sat here in her chair,
Smiling into the fire;
He who played stood there,
Bowing it higher and higher.

Childlike, I danced in a dream;
Blessings emblazoned that day;
Everything glowed with a gleam;
Yet we were looking away.

I always like to say that 'wood doesn't come in cans' as every tree is different depending on its species, growing speed, climate, environment and on so many factors that sometimes we forget that trees are a natural resource. And a very ancient one.

The grain and colour will be different from one stock to the next one and it becomes quite difficult sometimes to differentiate them from other species as they can be similar in many ways. I like to think that I can tell them apart. Not the vast majority, of course, but a high and respectable number. And in my case, this happened simply by being in contact with them, having worked with them, by remembering how they look, feeling their hardness, roughness of the bark, the leaves, height of the tree, by their most common uses, by asking somebody else who might just know, by keeping a large selection of ridiculously short off-cuts 'that I will use sometime' or, the most romantic of them all, by their smell.

All in all, it comes with practice and experience. And it comes very easily if you enjoy it too. It almost becomes like a game when you hold a piece of wood in your hands, inspect it in different angles and lights, and ends with a moment of glorious silly-self-pride of guessing it correctly. If you know about birds, if you like animals, if you like flowers, you know what I'm talking about.

The Wood Book, by interior architect-designer Francesc Zamora is actually more like an encyclopaedia, with 255 pages of information about 116 species of trees and bushes across the world.

The Wood Book
by Francesc Zamora
Loft Publications,
rrp £29.99
review by Diego Bernasconi

It allows the reader to have a quick course on tree and wood identification with a short but very-to-the-point description of each of the species. For each type, there is a concise five-colour chart that indicates the ease of machinability that goes from nailing to routing, turning to finishing (including sanding, planing, polishing and staining) and shows their suitability from very poor results to excellent results.

The description tells us about the shape and straightness of the trunk, shape of the crown, height of the tree, where it is found, typical characteristics of the bark and its changes as it grows, what sort of timber it will produce, texture, colour difference between heartwood and sapwood, if they are flexible, durable, resistant or prone to fungal attack and their most common uses. Each example shows its scientific/ botanical name, trade name, family name and its global status classification based on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species. A second chart shows their physical properties, such as bending strength, hardness, stiffness, weight, etc.

The pictures are beautiful and of high quality showing three images for every tree: in its environment, close-up of the bark (or leaves/

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Juniperus virginiana

fruit) and an image of the typical grain pattern. When it comes to identifying trees and wood, this is where the tricky part begins, as you will learn to recognise and distinguish the predictable and peculiar quirks that many species share. But as I said, it becomes easier with practice and even exciting to come upon the difficult ones. One day you will find yourself examining the specks of a simple sample with great curiosity. And knowing the answer.

Having this sort of book in your bookshelf or on your bespoke coffee table (that I hopefully made for you!) is a smart way to go, but some good advice is not to buy a book simply because it says "Furniture" or "Wood" or "Tree", as some can be inconsistent and even inaccurate. Or simply incomplete.

This one isn't.

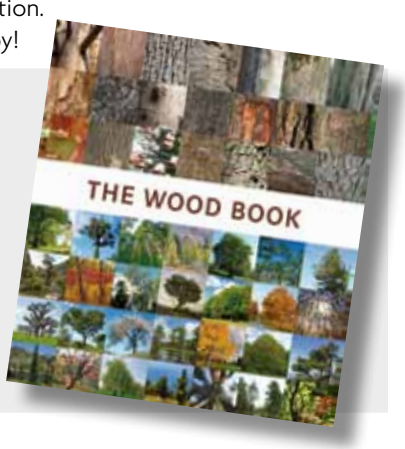
You can always try the web, where you will find hundreds of types of wood on a long list of images showing all the possible hues ranging from the lightest to the darkest colours. And they are all from the same species, so it can become quite contradictory and disconcerting. Sometimes it is better to go with the 'grain' and 'stick' with what you know.

In my opinion (of a determined and passionate furniture maker rather than a forestry expert), this is a very well presented hardcover book. It looks nice and is pleasantly heavy, with excellent quality paper, great pictures, relevant information with accurate descriptions and it is about wood! It may not come with a sample to smell, like an Avon catalogue, but at least it shows pictures of something that actually does matter.

The bibliography and related websites used are from well-respected sources, with the generous collaboration of one of the largest xylotheques in Europe, the Xiloteca Manuel Soler, in Spain.

I'm sure you will learn from it. And if you are an architect, a builder, a product designer, a carpenter, a furniture maker, a sculptor, a woods walker, a tree climber, or a wanna-be all of the above, then you should add *The Wood Book* to your collection.

Enjoy!



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Diego Bernasconi is an award-winning furniture maker-designer based in Lincolnshire. diegobernasconi.blogspot.co.uk

LETTER

To the editor:

I am sure mine will not be the only response you will receive regarding the article 'Goldengrove Unleaving' by Graham Cunningham about ivy on trees. Those of your readers requiring a more comprehensive comment on this issue should have a look at http://www.arborecology.co.uk/article_forf.htm#top, the views of Andrew Cowan N.D. Arb. published by Arbor Ecology Ltd. from whom I will quote extensively. How each of us views all sorts of things is subjective. One person's untidiness is another's manifestation of variety. Nature is, of course, neither untidy nor tidy it is simply what it is.

Ivy is an indigenous species and thus has been part of the British rural and urban landscape for a very long time, it is, in fact, our only evergreen climbing shrub. It is, in my opinion, erroneous to suggest it is somehow out of place. I have lived in Britain's countryside off and on since I was born, (I won't tell you how long ago that was) and I cannot say I have seen any significant change one way or another.

A plant in the wrong place is a weed and therefore it may be possible to argue that in certain circumstances such is in relation to parkland and garden trees where the tree itself is a feature, ivy might be considered 'unsightly'.

There is little doubt that the environmental attributes associated with ivy far outweigh any actual or perceived negatives. It provides all sorts of benefits to our wildlife: places for birds to nest and roost; summer roosts for bats; winter food for a wide variety of species; to name a few. It even prevents snow and frost from settling on the ground around its host tree in the winter so that animals can forage in the uncovered ground beneath it.

In the piece referenced above, Cowan says 'An experiment was carried out, from 1890-1942, where ivy was cut on half the trees in a wood, and left to its own devices on the rest. When the wood was felled in 1942 there appeared to be no difference in the height, average girth or cubic content of the trees.' It seems, therefore, that ivy has little effect on healthy trees. Cowan also says 'if ivy has become established on a tree, it is more likely to be a sign of stress than a cause of it. A heavy infestation of ivy, particularly in the upper crown, is usually an indication that the tree is in a natural state of decline; most healthy crowns will let insufficient light through for the ivy to grow vigorously. Ash, Fraxinus excelsior, is an exception as the crown tends to be thin and open. This allows major infestations to occur, thereby restricting photosynthesis, but it is still unlikely that the life of a healthy tree will be shortened. In the case of a diseased or dying tree, where it's growth rate and vigour may be slow or in decline, the ivy's more vigorous growth allow it to smother the tree. The bushy adult growth will then have a tendency to make the tree top heavy, making it more likely to fall, particularly during adverse weather conditions.'

Mr Cunningham implies that somehow, because they do not say what

he wants them to say, experts must be wrong. I think I would be inclined to take the opinion of an expert over a lay person in most cases.

As a recently retired coppice worker and traditional charcoal burner, I agree with Mr Cunningham. In a sense the English landscape is not a wilderness and has been, to some considerable extent, husbanded by man. However, I would take issue with his epithet that it was 'lovingly' so, most management occurred in order to produce product and an income rather than for aesthetic purposes.

Ivy in the countryside is not an issue. Much more serious is the decline in woodland crafts, trades and industry that will result and is resulting in a significant change to the character of British woodland. This change could have a dramatic impact on the survival of many iconic plants and animals. This is an issue about which noise should be made.

Paul Vodden

©Jim Laws/Alamy Stock Photo

Nancy Wood replies: Paul, to your second point first, because I completely agree. The decline in woodland expertise of all sorts is a serious issue for Britain and one that is not likely to raise headlines in the national press. We at Living Woods do our part to promote woodland career paths, but it would be a breakthrough for educators and policymakers to create programmes that not only expose children to forests for a few hours, but to actually put tools in their hands, to excite them about the reality of a working life in woodlands. Forest Schools and others are expert at this. Our young people need more. On the ivy debate, you're in a dead heat with Graham Cunningham 1 – 1. The tie-breaker goes to Nature.

Letters are welcome: nancy@livingwoodsmagazine.co.uk or Living Woods Magazine, 19 Half Moon Lane, London SE24 9JU.

Ode to the saw

British children learn about tropical rainforests and deforestation in schools as part of the national curriculum, but are taught virtually nothing about our own native forests. In an increasingly urban world, most young people, except those fortunate enough to experience Forest School, will leave education with little understanding of the natural world round them. It's perhaps unsurprising therefore that, for these deprived young people, the sound of a chainsaw in a British woodland is associated with destruction rather than rejuvenation.

I'm increasingly convinced by the power of art, in all forms, in helping tackle what Richard Louv coined 'nature deficit disorder'. I've run a number of projects at Sylva Foundation (which I co-founded in 2009) – for example the OneOak project – that have combined science and art to introduce forestry to wider society. On a personal level I've chosen to write widely on the subject, both in my forestry blog and in books; my first being *The New Sylva* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014).

My latest book is an eco-parable short story, a sequel to Jean Giono's 1954 classic *The Man Who Planted Trees and Grew Happiness*. Giono aimed to popularise tree planting, and his allegorical story contrasted the benefits of environmental restoration with the futility and destructiveness of war. His popular book certainly played a part in helping make tree planting not just a social norm but a 'good thing' celebrated by individuals and families, and corporations looking for good PR. Yet sixty years later harvesting trees is still associated with exploitation and destruction.

My aim in writing *The Man Who Harvested Trees and Gifted Life* is to illustrate how foresters care for woodlands over multiple generations, and explain how managing forests and harvesting trees can equal good environmental stewardship. I include a short poem in the foreword *Philosophy is Forestry's Child*, and the Sustainable *Forestry Song* in the back of the book, which I've had fun developing in the classroom.

Gabriel Hemery's new book *The Man Who Harvested Trees and Gifted Life* is available as an ebook on Amazon. £2.49. Read more at www.GabrielHemery.com/books

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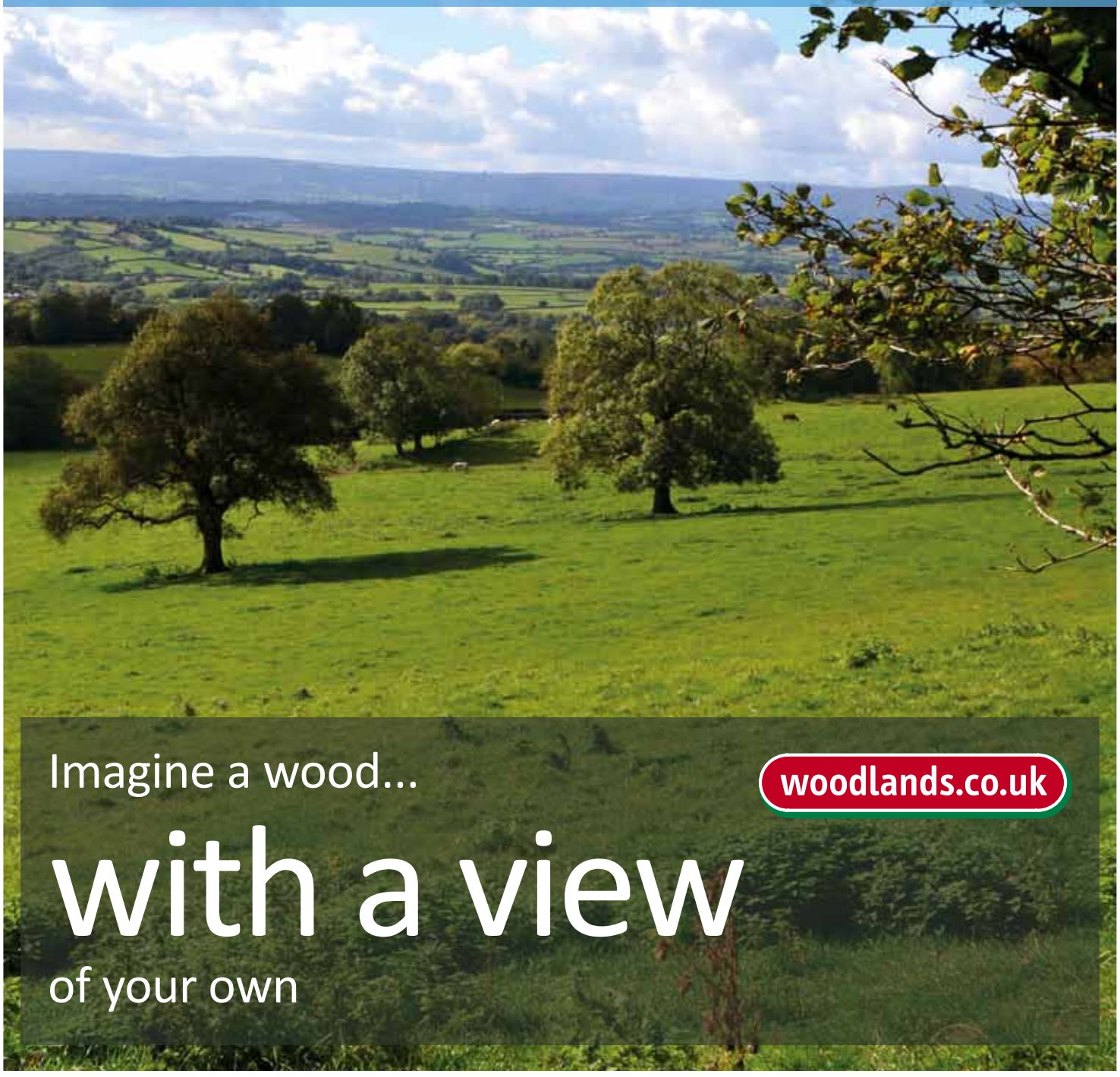

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