



Living Woods

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MAGAZINE

Woodland burials

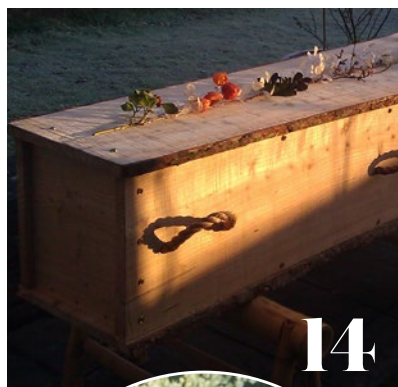
In search of a green afterlife

PLUS
Bats in woodlands
Chainsaws – time to go electric?
Woodfuelling in the National Forest

CONTENTS

With spring appearing earlier than ever this year, 2019 is already shaping up to be another extraordinary year. The concerns of woodland owners remain remarkably consistent, however, and we hope we can address some of them. If you're in the market for a new chainsaw after a busy winter season, read our article on the differences between electric, battery and petrol types. If you wonder how to afford such luxuries, explore Simon Lloyd's suggestions on how to make your woodland both resilient and economic. Finally, if it all seems too much, consider how to achieve a woodland burial. It is easier than you might expect, and if you want to spend eternity in your woodland, please be assured that the 28-day rule does not apply.

Judith Millidge Editor
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LIAM CHARMER/UNSPLASH

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@Woodland News

EVOLVING THE FOREST, DARTINGTON HALL 19-21 JUNE 2019

A midsummer three-day symposium, **Evolving the Forest**, is all set to mark 100 years of modern forestry in the UK. Professor Fiona Stafford, author of *The Long, Long Life of Trees*, will deliver the opening keynote speech reflecting on *Why Trees Matter*, a reflection on the cultural importance of trees within literature and society from the 18th century to the present day.

Professor Kathy Willis, CBE, Professor of Biodiversity at the University of Oxford, (pictured above) will deliver this year's prestigious Royal Forestry Society NDG James Memorial Lecture, *The Framing of the UK's forests: past, present and future*, which will be open to the public as well as conference delegates.

It will examine the huge potential of forestry data, from historical records



to more recent satellite imagery, to fill gaps in understanding the natural capital benefits provided by UK forests. Professor Willis will also explore the important steps needed for the UK's forests to become firmly embedded within natural capital framing.

Break-out sessions will be led by a who's who of forestry experts – from Keith Kirby on *Evolution or Revolution for Future Forestry* and Roderick Leslie on *Transforming the Forestry Commission*, to Omer Aloni on *Forest Policy in the interwar context of the new League of Nations* and Simon

Leadbeater on *Restoring the Sacred to Britain's Woodland Groves*.

Hands-on workshop opportunities will include a visit to view the Dartington Estate's pioneering agroforestry project and will explore ways to use trees and woodland for health and well-being.

The artistic voice is scattered throughout the event as a constant reminder of how and why people love trees and how fundamental they are to our relationship with the natural world and the living planet.

The event is produced by art.earth in association with the **Royal Forestry Society** and **Timber Strategies**. The gala dinner is sponsored by Tilhill Forestry.

For more information visit evolvingtheforest.uk. Limited discounted tickets are available to RFS members at www.rfs.org.uk/events.

£4 MILLION FOR WOODLANDS FROM HS2 FUND

Funding is available to create native woodland or restore Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) within 25 miles of the HS2 phase one route.

For the second year, the grant will fund the creation of new native woodland between 1 and 25 hectares, especially where it connects or expands existing woodland to benefit habitat resilience. The grant also funds the removal of exotic species and restoration of native tree species in PAWS woodlands.

Applications to the HS2 Woodland Fund will open on 11 March. Full details will be available on the **HS2 Woodland Fund webpage** in early March.



NEW WOOD FAIR FOR THE SOUTH-WEST

Celebrating all things wood and crafty, the **Opus Wood Fair** launches for the first time on 6th and 7th July 2019 in Burrowbridge on the Somerset Levels.

With a host of traders and crafts people lined up to demonstrate their skills, the organisers want to involve as many people as possible.

Visit the website for early-bird discounts on tickets or for a trader's application form. For those that love working with wood – the smell, the feel

and the satisfaction of making – and for those that prefer to watch and admire, Opus Wood Fair provides a wonderful opportunity to bask

in the work of a broad range of artists, conservationists and woodworkers.



www.opuswoodandcraftfair.co.uk

URBAN JUNGLE

The Greater London Authority has published a data map showing the locations within London where tree canopies can be seen from overhead. Although there are about as many trees as people in London, with 21% of the capital's land area covered, one use for the data will be to pinpoint areas where tree cover is low.

Using high-resolution aerial imagery of the whole of London, this new data is far more accurate and detailed than previous estimates, which were based on statistical sampling from different areas of the capital.

London is one of the greenest urban areas in the world – indeed its tree cover is well above the English average of 13%.

Download the detailed Google Earth maps of Greater London from the **Mayor of London's website**.



RISK MANAGEMENT OF TREES

Owners whose woods border a public highway or footpath are often concerned about their liabilities regarding tree safety.

A basic insurance policy with liability up to £5 million will cost in the region of £200 per year. Leaflets published by the Tree Safety Group in conjunction with the Forestry Commission provide advice for owners and managers on inspecting and maintaining trees, as well as common-sense guidance on public safety.

They can be downloaded for free from the **Tree Safety website**.

FUEL FOR THOUGHT

A wood stove, chip or biomass boiler is only as good as the wood you burn in it and with recent concerns about emissions in urban areas, Woodsure – the UK's only woodfuel quality assurance scheme – are working to ensure that consumers burn quality, well-dried fuel.

Helen Bentley-Fox, Director of Woodsure, explains, 'Using properly dried wood is vital for maintaining stoves and environmental concerns. Essentially, poor quality, or inappropriate fuel affects the efficiency of your boiler or wood-burning appliance. If you try to burn wood that is too wet it is harder to light, gives off excess smoke and uses

more of the fire's energy to boil off the water, so you get less heat and use more wood.

Properly dried or seasoned woodfuel will maintain efficiency and minimise the release of emissions and harmful particles going up the chimney, as modern stoves are designed to burn firewood below a certain moisture content level.'

Five ways to ensure dry fuel

1. Use properly dried or seasoned wood, such as Woodsure Ready to Burn certified fuel.
2. Store it in a dry, airy environment protected from humidity.
3. Stack the wood off the ground to avoid contamination.



4. Split bigger logs before storage and remove bark to dry quicker.
5. Chop into a variety of sizes to make it easier to light your fire.

When you buy woodfuel, look for the Woodsure quality mark, which means that a supplier of firewood has been through rigorous checks and laboratory testing to meet recognised European and international wood fuel standards. Information on Woodsure and quality assured suppliers is available via the interactive map on the **Woodsure website**.

MAPPING TOOLS FOR WOODLAND OWNERS

Sylva Foundation's myForest mapping application has been updated and improved.

Since its launch in 2009, Sylva Foundation's myForest web tool has been growing steadily, just like the woodlands it exists to support. The environmental charity has relied on word-of-mouth and a strong reputation for the increasing popularity of its online tools and resources supporting woodland management.

myForest is used by thousands of woodland owners, managers and educators to map and manage more than 75,000ha of woodland across Britain. Its development has been supported in part by charitable trusts, government bodies, corporations, and individual donors. However, myForest requires regular funding to support maintenance and development, and Sylva Foundation receives frequent requests for new features.

Behind the scenes, thanks to core support from the Dulverton Trust, Sylva Foundation has been hard at work developing a range of additional premium-level tools which it now hopes some woodland owners and managers will opt to use. The most

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It's a great free package that integrates woodland management, UK forestry standards and the Forestry Commission management template.

”

significant additions to the service, accessed via the new premium account are

- OS mapping (additional costs may apply).
- Advanced printing.
- Overlaying of data layers such as ancient woodland boundaries.
- Summary reports for species and age-class distributions.
- Export to a spreadsheet so that it can be taken into the field.
- Sharing information.

More features will be added to premium accounts over time and the charity will be developing a myForest mobile app by the end of the year.

Paul Orsi from Sylva Foundation, who manages myForest, explained:

'We have introduced these additional tools in response to demands by users. We have kept the costs as low as possible, at only £24/year for a Woodland Owner account and £120/year for an Agent account.

'We hope that some owners, managers, and agents, will subscribe to a premium account. The income generated will support ongoing maintenance and allow us to invest further in the future of myForest.'

SPECIAL OFFER

SWOG members can take advantage of a 20% discount for a myForest premium account by using the following code before the end of March: SWOG20.

www.myforest.org.uk

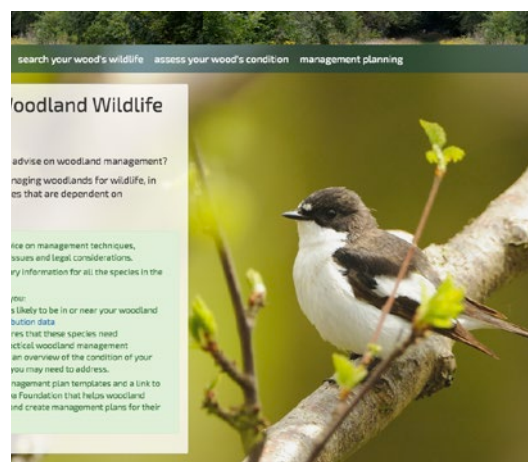
WOODLAND WILDLIFE TOOLKIT

For those who want to manage woodland to encourage wildlife, the new **Woodland Wildlife Toolkit** is a useful resource. Backed by Sylva Foundation, the RSPB and the Woodland Trust as well as several conservation organisations, it is a free online resource that helps owners and managers both to assess the condition of their woodlands and to identify the species likely to be found in them.

Searching is easy – just drop a pin on the map, or use a grid reference to:

- Find out which wildlife is likely to be in or near your woodland based on available survey or distribution data.
- Understand the habitats and features of each species' needs.
- Learn how to provide these habitats through practical woodland management.

www.woodlandwildlifetoolkit.org.uk



PROTECTED SPECIES PART 3

BATS

A barbastelle bat (Frank Greenaway/Vincent Wildlife Trust)

From a conservation angle, bats in woodlands are a wonderful thing. But how do you deal with them if they take up residence in an area destined for management work?

PETRA BILLINGS provides some guidance.

Bats are a remarkable group of mammals. They are our only flying mammals. Not only do they fly, but they do so at night using an ultrasound facility known as echolocation, hunting their insect prey using high frequency sounds. They roost in trees or caves (or buildings), moving from hibernation roosts in winter to maternity roosts in the summer.

Although most British bats can be found in woodlands as well as waterways, in farmland and other suitable urban habitat, some are real woodland specialists. The rare Bechstein's bat (*Myotis bechsteinii*), for example, lives in old growth oak woodlands and often makes use of old woodpecker holes to roost in. Bechstein's bats are 'gleaners' and feed by swooping down to the ground to pick up their insect

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If you come across bats or signs of a roost in your woodland, stop work straightaway and seek advice from Natural England.
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prey. The barbastelle (*Barbastella barbastellus*), on the other hand, is a 'hawker' which catches its prey on the wing. It has a fascinating ecology, roosting behind lifted plates of bark or in crevices of old trees in deciduous ancient woodland and

commuting along hedgerows, streams and other linear landscape features to forage on river floodplains and wetland areas. Individual bats remain faithful to the same commuting routes for many years.

Different bat species use different parts of trees for roosting and feeding, and the same bats may use different tree habitats at different times of the year. Breeding females may choose maternity roost sites high in the canopy where it's warmer, but will move to cooler sites lower down for hibernation. Some bats, such as the noctule (*Nyctalus noctule*) and the Leisler's bat (*Nyctalus leisleri*), prefer more open woodland habitats or woodland edges as they are narrow-winged, which allows for faster flight. Others, such as the Alcaethoe bat (*Myotis alcathoe*) and the Bechstein's bat, prefer woodland

interiors as they are broad-winged and can fly slowly through the uncluttered understorey. The more common brown long-eared bat (*Plecotus auratus*) and Natterer's bat (*Myotis nattereri*) use both woodland interiors and edge habitats.

Protection for bats

There are 17 species of breeding bat in Britain and, along with their roosts, they are all legally protected by both domestic and international legislation. It is an offence to:

1. Deliberately take, injure or kill a bat.
2. Deliberately disturb a bat in a manner that would impair its ability to survive, reproduce, rear or nurture young, hibernate or migrate, or (significantly) affect the species' local distribution or abundance.
3. Intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat in its roost or deliberately disturb a group of bats.
4. Damage or destroy a place used by bats for breeding or resting (roosts) even if bats are not occupying the roost at the time.
5. Intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a roost.
6. Possess or advertise/sell/exchange a bat of a species found in the wild in the EU (dead or alive) or any part of a bat.

Managing woodland for bats

So how should you manage your woods for bats? It is the landowner's responsibility to ensure that any and all European Protected Species (EPS) have been considered before carrying out any forestry or tree operations. In the context of bats, the first thing to do is to assess your trees/woodland for bat roost potential. Carry out a ground assessment during winter or spring, when there are no leaves, to identify potential bat roosts. Look for cavities in the trunks, branches and at the base of the tree; rot-holes, knot-holes; and woodpecker holes; flaking bark, crevices and old growth ivy. Any of these features could support a colony of bats. Small or young trees are less likely to be used by bats, but any tree with suitable features could



potentially be used.

Good practice woodland management for bats should aim to protect all existing confirmed roost sites and to retain most potential roost sites, using a risk-based approach. Ideally, you should try to ensure continuity for any roosts by improving the age structure of your woods. Create a good network of

foraging habitat by maintaining open spaces within the woods but avoid isolating any areas. Retain standing wood as long as it doesn't pose any safety risks, especially along public rights of way.

If you follow the best practice guidance, you will usually be able to minimise disturbance to bats or damage to their habitat. However,

Above: A lesser horseshoe bat in flight. (Frank Greenaway/Vincent Wildlife Trust)
Below: Brown long-eared bats in a roosting box. (Hugh Clark/Bat Conservation Trust)



MAKING A BAT BOX

You can use most types of wood: rough-sawn and untreated is best. Don't use anything treated with chemicals. This box is made from spare bits of chestnut, with grooves added to make it easier for the bats to get a grip when they roost.

It can be fixed together with galvanised nails. Try to make it as weather-proof as possible, as bats like stay warm and dry like the rest of us. Leave a gap at the bottom of about 15–20mm for them to crawl in and gain access.

Situate your box up high, in a sunny, sheltered position. Once it's there you shouldn't disturb it; in fact you will need a special licence to open it.

RICHARD HARE



if this is unavoidable, you need to apply for a European Protected Species licence from Natural England. A licence will be required if you plan to fell or carry out surgery to a tree with a confirmed bat roost or if you plan to fell buffer trees around a known roost site. It will also be required if you are felling a large proportion of potential roost sites.

The golden rule is that, if you come across bats or signs of a roost in your woodland during forestry operations, stop work straightaway and seek advice from Natural England.

There is further information on bats and the law at **the Gov.uk site**. The **Bat Conservation Trust** has a great deal of information online. There are more than 80 local bat groups which will also be able to refer you to licensed bat workers if you require a survey. There is a list on the Bat Conservation website.



LINKED RESOURCES

Bat Conservation Trust
Bats and trees
List of local bat groups

Bats and the law

Forestry Commission –
Woodland management for bats

Vincent Wildlife Trust

Video: Jenny Clark of Sussex
Bat Hospital on bat rescue.

DR PETRA BILLINGS is a Chartered Ecologist who has worked in conservation management in Sussex for more than 25 years. Petra offers a range of ecological services, specialising in woodland management plans, Countryside Stewardship grant applications, ecological surveys and in providing training courses. Visit her website www.sussexwoodlands.co.uk

WOODLANDS IS YOURS LOSING MONEY?

SIMON LLOYD, Chief Executive of the Royal Forestry Society, provides advice for owners of small woodlands.

In January the Royal Forestry Society released **Bringing Woodland into Management: the Missed Opportunities**, a report on the management of woodlands in England. The report suggests that with only around 59% of woods in England and 57% in Wales under active management, the total lost value of timber and woodfuel sales is estimated at over £20m a year. DEFRA calculations indicate additional lost environmental and social benefits of up to £80m.

With 72% of all English and Welsh woodlands in private hands, small woodland owners can play a valuable part in redressing the balance.

Surely woodland can just be left to get on with growing? Why does woodland need managing?



A managed woodland is healthier, better able to withstand pressures of pests and diseases, is friendlier to wildlife, fosters a wider variety of plant life and is more likely to result in the finest trees of landscape or timber value. When woodland trees are crowded together competing

for light they have less energy to withstand disease. The forest canopy is closed, light is blocked to the woodland floor suppressing most ground flora and understorey. Moisture is trapped in the wood, encouraging pathogens to take hold. Most woodland owners want to pass on their woods in as good or better condition than they found them. This is not achieved by neglect.

What simple things can small woodland owners do to improve the management of their woods?

A few, but by no means exhaustive list of management activities to consider for small woods:

- Pest control: an over-abundance of deer and grey squirrels can quickly accumulate in woodlands with very negative impacts on ground flora and





Managed woodlands produce healthier trees, a richer and more diverse understorey and huge benefits to wildlife.

tree health. Starting a pest control regime will benefit the health of the wood.

- **Coppicing:** coppice is the product of management and neglect stops coppice filling its function in understorey. Coppicing back overgrown coppice stools will introduce a better structure to the woodland.

- **Thinning:** give the most promising trees more space to grow by removing those which are most closely competing with them. This will bring more light to the woodland floor for a time. In a small wood this may be achieved without a thinning licence – but check first.

- **Ride management:** cut back trees and shrubs which are crowding into or overhanging a woodland ride so that the maximum sunlight falls on the ride to encourage butterflies and other wildlife

Is it really worth trying to manage a small plot of say 5 acres for timber production?

Yes, if that is the owner's primary objective, it is definitely worth it, but it is a long-term game. In 5 acres

(c.2 ha) there may be 150-200 final crop trees. The market price for good quality planking oak is over £200/m³. This is a significant premium to the value of firewood at about £40/m³. The current owner may not realise this premium timber value, but will gain a lot of pleasure in knowing that they are growing the best quality trees for the future. It is also important for a small woodland owner to find premium markets for their timber, and to seek to secure value up the supply chain.

How do I go about getting my standing timber valued? Are contractors interested in small plots?

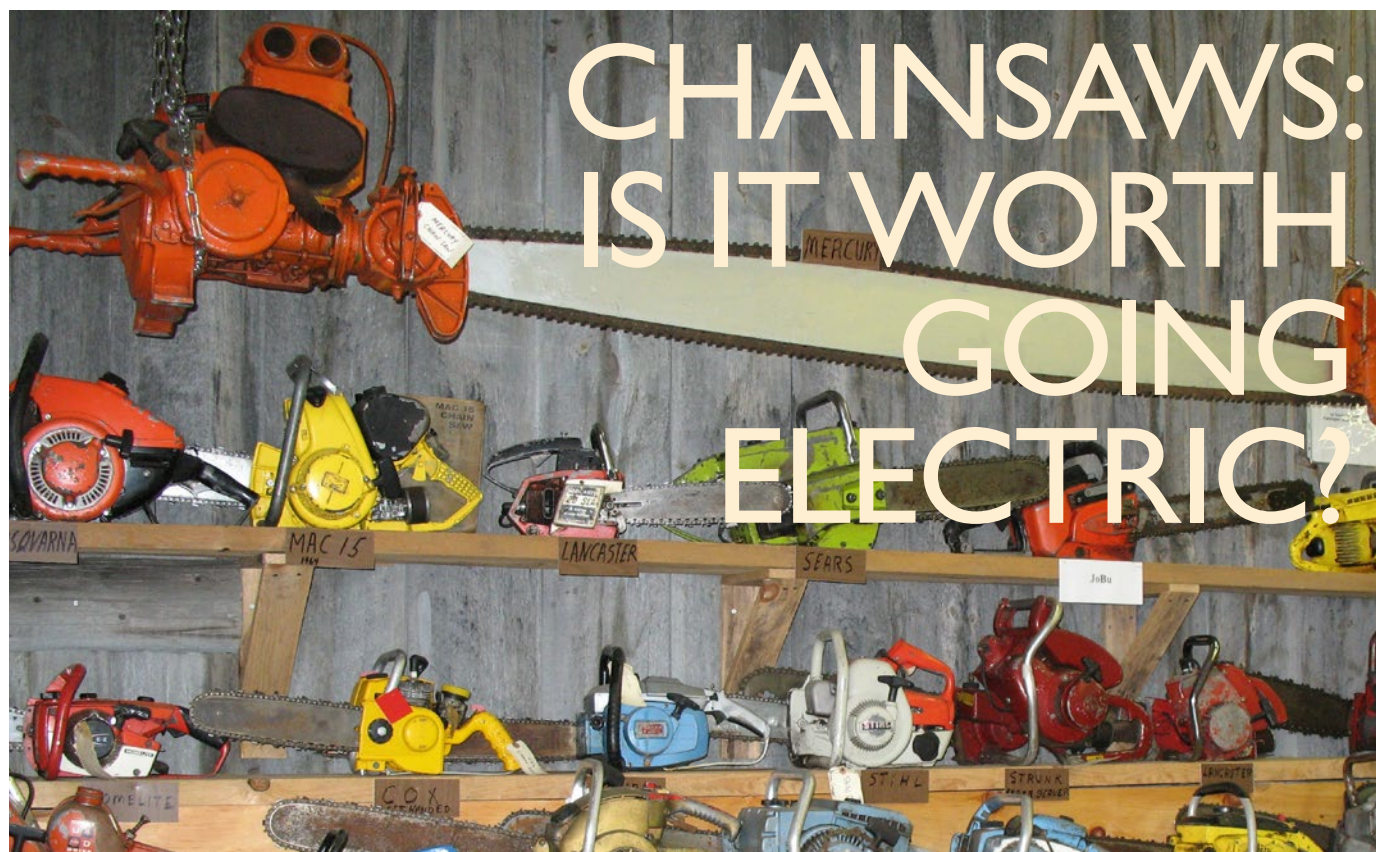
Good forestry agents will earn their fee by finding the best markets and value for standing timber. They will also know the contractor market well and may be in a position to group jobs together to make it more interesting for a contractor. Owner collaboration to create scale economies makes sense and is normal practice in continental Europe, but seems to be difficult to achieve in the UK.

I'm not a woodland owner, but I'd love to get involved with working in the woods. How do I go about it?

There are many opportunities for volunteering in woodlands. The RFS and the Chiltern Society organise volunteer work parties in woods owned and managed by the RFS near Berkhamsted, and the Chiltern Society has similar schemes in place in the Chilterns. There is a growing number of community and social enterprise woodlands in the UK, built on the ethos of volunteering.

SIMON LLOYD leads the development of RFS strategy and a number of high profile projects and partnerships. Simon has more than 30 years of commercial business management experience and owns and manages woodlands in Herefordshire.

The **Royal Forestry Society** is the largest and longest-established education charity promoting the wise management of woods in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.



The majority of woodland management is carried out under power, with most workers opting to use a chainsaw to fell trees. But in a crowded market, what sort should you buy?

ANDREW JOHNSON of Northern Arb Supplies offers some guidance.

Experienced woodland owners and managers invariably have firm views about chainsaws: the right sort for particular tasks, the best brands, whose chains last longest, which ones start most easily, and, of course, price. Then there is the difference between petrol, electric and battery-powered machines.

For new owners, the choice can be baffling.

The best advice is to talk to existing users, make sure you try several different models before you buy and above all, once you've got one, spend some time learning the basics from a trained instructor on a chainsaw course.

Every type of chainsaw has its pros and cons and it is important to consider them carefully before making a choice. Most professional arborists eventually find a solution that works for them after experimenting with different types of tools.

PETROL CHAINSaws

With petrol as their primary fuel, petrol chainsaws have a two-stroke internal combustion engine with a single cylinder. The petrol fuel mixes with air inside the carburettor and is transported to the engine, where it

is converted to power. The two-stroke engine generates power to turn the crankshaft, which is connected to a set of gears. The gears power the centrifugal clutch that channels the power to the sprocket, and this holds and directs the movement of the chain. When the chain reaches adequate speed, it can cut through wood effectively.

Felling a tree with a petrol chainsaw, 1941.
(Photo: US Forest Service – Pacific Northwest Region.)



Petrol chainsaws are often used by loggers to bring down big trees or large branches. The larger models are powerful tools, suitable for large-scale operations. This saw is also the primary tool of arborists who work in remote or woodland locations where there is little/no access to electricity. Many woodland owners use them to work their woodlands and to produce firewood.

PROS

- Petrol chainsaws are powerful, thanks to their two-stroke engine. Blades can be as long as 90cm (36 in.) and more, which makes them great for large jobs. They're often much more powerful than electric chainsaws.
- They are easy to manoeuvre and you don't have to deal with wires and cords around your work site.
- This type of chainsaw is capable of handling almost every kind of job easily. There is a huge range of sizes in terms of bars and power. You can find chainsaws for personal, domestic, and professional use.

CONS

- Petrol chainsaws require upper body strength and a firm grip. New users should get trained in order to become accustomed to them.
- The fuelling process is a little cumbersome and time-consuming. You need to wait for the engine to cool down before refuelling. It is essential to add the right amount of two-stroke oil to the petrol.
- They are noisy, vibrate and can emit noxious fumes. The machine can get hot when used continuously.
- Petrol chainsaws require careful maintenance and must be stored carefully and drained if not used for a long period.

ELECTRIC CHAINSAWS

An electric chainsaw works on electric power, either from the mains or a generator. They are generally smaller in size and lighter than petrol models. Electric engines generate and supply power to the chainsaw blade through the crankshaft mechanism. The centrifugal clutch controls the movement of the blade and ensures that the chain is moving only when needed, even if the engine is on.

Most electric chainsaws are supplied with more than 30m of cable. They are ideal for small-scale and intricate cutting tasks and are often used by landscapers, homeowners and gardeners. These saws have enough power to deal with small branches, bushes, shrubs and plants; some of the larger models can also be used to cut sturdy trees.

PROS

- Electric chainsaws are easy to handle and use. They're not too heavy or cumbersome. The blades are no longer than about 38cm (14 in.), which makes them a great choice for new users.
- They start at the press of a button, unlike petrol models, which (mostly) have to be primed before the starter cord is pulled.
- These saws are easier to store and don't require specific storage or conditions.

CONS

- Electric chainsaws aren't as powerful as petrol saws, which means they are unsuitable in large-scale professional applications.
- The long, dangling cord is cumbersome and can also be a safety hazard. It limits your range of action and can even get in the way of your work.



BATTERY-POWERED CHAINSAWS

At the basic level, both battery-powered and petrol chainsaws provide the same functionality. They both have a motor, bar, chain and drive gear. The difference lies in their motor and the effect it has on everyday operation and usability. Both have sufficient torque and power to saw through the toughest wood.

PROS

- A battery chainsaw is quiet and starts with just the push of a button.
- It can last for several hours' work, depending on the battery pack.
- Battery-powered models are generally well-balanced and lightweight.
- Battery chainsaws are much quieter and emission-free.

CONS

- Battery life – a spare back-up battery is a must.
- Cost of batteries.

Batteries are available in a range of sizes from 4.0Ah to 31.1Ah, with operating time anything between 25 minutes and 18 hours. It is sensible to keep an extra charged battery handy.

Most leading brands, such as Stihl and Husqvarna, offer new generation lithium-ion batteries that can easily match the power of small (around 50cc) petrol-driven chainsaws without any of the drawbacks. Batteries are often much cheaper when you buy them with a tool and some batteries can be used across a range of tools from a particular manufacturer.

COST

The outright cost of buying a battery saw with two batteries will be more than a standard petrol chainsaw. But petrol engines are more complex than electric motors, so there is more to go wrong, and running costs with petrol and mixing oil are higher than electric charging costs. All saws require chain oil and replacement chains. Battery saws are cheaper to maintain and tend to have a longer life span.

THE VERDICT

Different arborists have different requirements and one tool isn't necessarily better than the other. Many owners buy a petrol chainsaw for work in the woods and use a smaller electric model for cross-cutting logs at home. All tools will require ongoing maintenance and all users should consider some sort of training for the purposes of safety.

USING A BATTERY CHAINSAW

Woodland owner Mike Pepler uses a Husqvarna 536Li XP battery chainsaw with a BLi300 lithium-ion battery.

He says, 'It takes just over an hour to charge this size battery from empty, using the 330W charger. It uses $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of a battery to fill a 1m³ trailer with logs (depending on log length) – about an hour's work – though probably only 20 minutes of actual full power running, as the rest of the time is handling wood. Coppicing is lighter work than logging, and when working alone I've not managed to empty both batteries in a day (although I spend some of the time splitting and

stacking 2m lengths of wood). The battery itself is heavier than a tank of fuel, but the motor is much lighter than a petrol engine, so overall the machine is lighter than our 50cc petrol chainsaw. It is not quite as powerful and I'd estimate that it is equivalent to a 30-35cc saw.'

In a virtuous circle, Mike charges his Husky at home via his solar-powered system. Mike believes that the BLi300 battery (with a capacity of 9.4Ah at 36V) gets the same work done as a tank of fuel in his 50cc petrol chainsaw.

Watch his short video showing the saw being used to fell a tree.



Northern Arb Supplies

sell consumables: chain oil, bars, replacement chains, as well as safety gear and other items vital for woodland work.

CHAINSAW SUPPLIERS

Manufacturers' websites: click on the links below.

Black and Decker
Bosch
Dolmar
Echo
Husqvarna
Makita
McCulloch
Oregon
Ryobi
Stihl

Living Woods Issue 44

Summer 2017 has buying advice on page 20.

GOING UNDERGROUND

IN SEARCH OF A GREENER AFTERLIFE

JULIA GOODFELLOW-SMITH'S regular view through the trees comes from a different angle. Would you consider a woodland burial? And if so, how do you go about arranging it?

On his first visit to our woodland, my dad was admiring the view through the trees. He was clearly charmed. 'Julia, do you think I could be buried here?'

'Not yet, of course – after I have died,' he clarified. A few days later, Mike's dad asked us the same question.

We immediately saw the attractions of a woodland burial. Imagine a funeral underneath magnificent, cathedral-like trees, with bird song accompanying the eulogies and cherry blossom drifting through the air. Imagine no restrictions on the format, style or duration of the funeral. Imagine a funeral that starts the healing process. Imagine being able to plant a tree on the grave, a tree you can visit and enjoy as a living memorial. Another step in the healing process.

And there are other benefits too. Cremations are energy-intensive and polluting. A woodland burial negates the need for any pollution to be caused or energy to be used, except, of course, that associated with digging the grave. Traditional graveyards are filling up and tend to be intensively managed. Memorials are often made from imported stone and can become unstable.

We were surprised to find that, legally speaking, it's relatively simple to bury someone on your own land. All you need to do is make sure that you won't be polluting any water sources and fill out some paperwork – see the information box for more details.

There are, of course, some practicalities to consider.



Capsula Mundi is an innovative Italian burial concept. An egg-shaped, organic burial pod, made of biodegradable material, holds ashes. In time, the company hope to produce larger pods that will accommodate bodies for burial. A tree is then planted on top of the egg, for families to commemorate their loved one and continue to care for the tree as it grows. (Photo courtesy www.capsulamundi.com)

Digging and planting

First of all, the grave itself. It is hard work digging a grave. By hand, it is likely to take you at least half a day, depending on your soil type and the number of tree roots you encounter. You probably want to find a spot that's not too close to an existing tree, to avoid large roots – for the sake of the tree and your back. You may be able to employ the services of your local grave digger. Alternatively, some people find the process of digging the grave themselves cathartic. Once the grave is dug, please be aware that it is dangerous to both passing people and wildlife. You might want to securely cover it to stop anyone – or anything – from falling in.

If you are going to have people attending a funeral in your woods, you will also need to think about parking facilities or transport arrangements.

Natural burial

One important but possibly difficult subject to broach is that of synthetic materials. Many coffins are made from composite materials full of glues such as formaldehyde and may be lined with polyester. These are things that you won't want to introduce into your woodland. For a woodland burial, it is preferable for the body not to be embalmed and for the clothes, shroud and coffin to be made from natural materials.

The burial of ashes is, of course,



All the materials involved in a woodland burial – coffin, shroud, clothing – need to be biodegradable and therefore made from natural rather than man-made materials. (Photo courtesy Roucan Loch Woodland Burials.)

much easier to address and is not subject to any special legal requirements.

Thinking about woodland burials has made me realise what a wonderful gift we can give to our loved ones and to ourselves. Mike and I have been concerned about how hard it would be to dig the graves, whether we would damage our trees and whether we would devalue part of our woodland. But now, I think that the benefits outweigh the risks.

So yes, Dad, I would be happy to bury you in our woods. Once you've died, of course.

THE LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

You must not bury a person (or larger pet, such as a horse) within 50 metres of any well, borehole or spring supplying water for human consumption or used in food production. In theory, the Drinking Water Inspectorate and the local authority hold details of private water supplies. In reality, not all boreholes and wells are registered, so you may need to ask your neighbours to be sure. Of course, if you can find somewhere that is more than 50 metres from your boundaries, then you will know about any relevant water supplies, as they would be on your land.

The other stipulation relating to water quality is that you must not bury people in graves that are waterlogged. The bottom of the grave needs to be at least one metre above the water table. It should not have any standing water in it when dug; it must not be dug in an area susceptible to flooding; or be dug into bedrock. There needs to be one metre of soil above the body or coffin once buried.

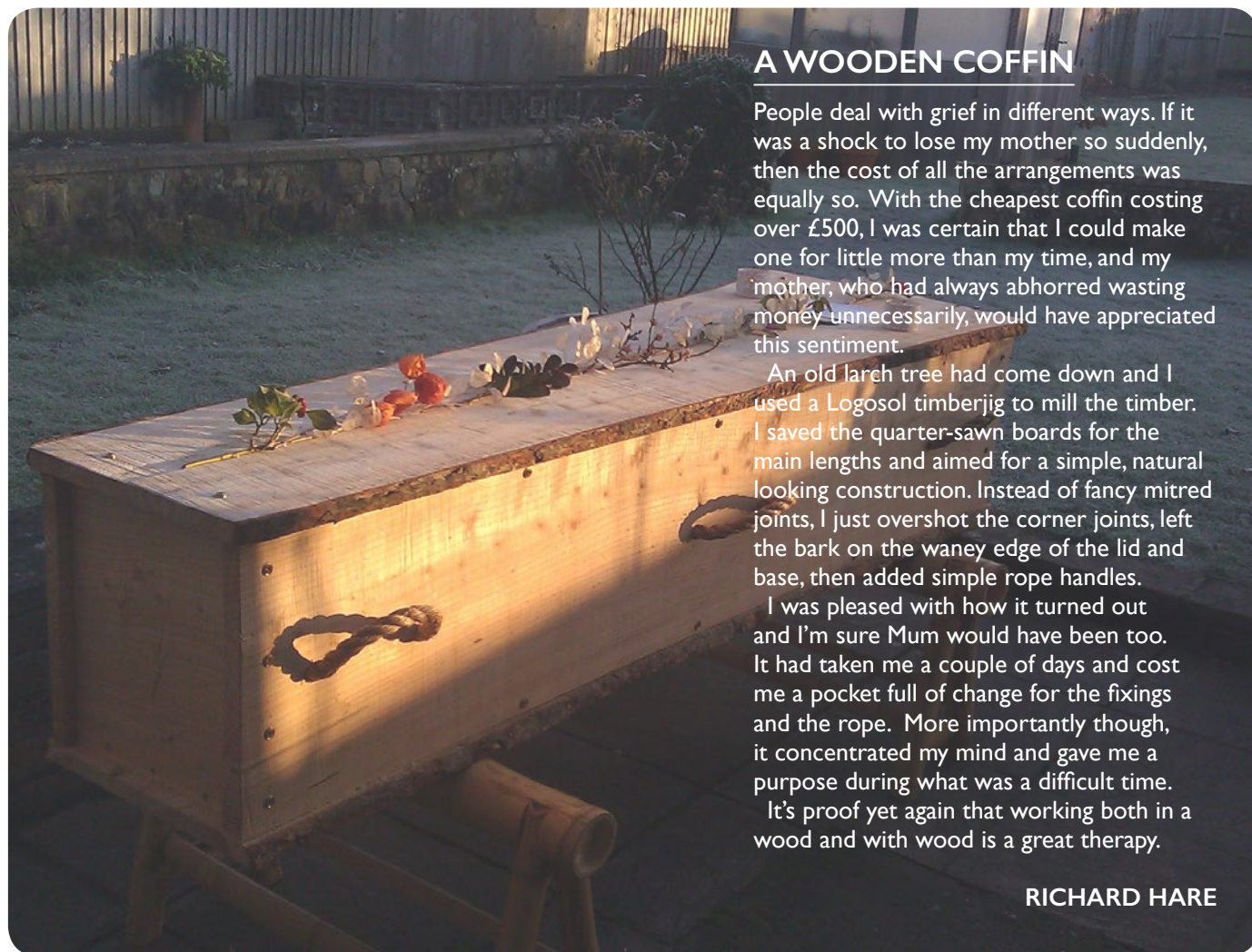
In terms of paperwork, you will need to complete a burial authorisation form

from your local council, record the burial in a land burial register and make a clear, detailed plan showing where the burial took place. The land burial register is not in a specific format – you just need to record the person's details and place of burial. The register and plan should be kept with the property's deeds.

ESTABLISHING A WOODLAND BURIAL GROUND

If you want to go a step further and turn your woodland into more than an occasional burial place, it's rather more complex. The groundwater requirements are more stringent, planning permission will be required for change of use and you will probably need an ecological survey. Planners will be concerned about how mourners will get to the woodland and how much it is likely to impact on traffic in the area. Community consultation is essential from the start.

Environment Agency – groundwater requirements: www.gov.uk/guidance



A WOODEN COFFIN

People deal with grief in different ways. If it was a shock to lose my mother so suddenly, then the cost of all the arrangements was equally so. With the cheapest coffin costing over £500, I was certain that I could make one for little more than my time, and my mother, who had always abhorred wasting money unnecessarily, would have appreciated this sentiment.

An old larch tree had come down and I used a Logosol timberjig to mill the timber. I saved the quarter-sawn boards for the main lengths and aimed for a simple, natural looking construction. Instead of fancy mitred joints, I just overshot the corner joints, left the bark on the waney edge of the lid and base, then added simple rope handles.

I was pleased with how it turned out and I'm sure Mum would have been too. It had taken me a couple of days and cost me a pocket full of change for the fixings and the rope. More importantly though, it concentrated my mind and gave me a purpose during what was a difficult time.

It's proof yet again that working both in a wood and with wood is a great therapy.

RICHARD HARE

GREEN BURIAL INFORMATION

The Natural Death Centre provides advice on everything from how to safely dig a grave, how to organise a funeral without a funeral director, and the code of practice for operating a natural burial ground.

www.naturaldeath.org.uk

WOODLAND BURIAL SITES

Bristol

www.arnosvale.org.uk

Cumbria

www.daltonwoodlandburial.co.uk

Dumfries

www.roucanloch.co.uk

Glasgow

www.craufurdlan.co.uk/burial-ground

Hertfordshire

www.woodlandburialtrust.com

Lincolnshire

www.hillholtwood.co.uk/burial

East Lothian

www.binningwood.co.uk

Pwllheli, Wales

www.eternalforest.org

Norfolk

www.guntonwoodlandburial.co.uk

Wiltshire

www.woodlandburialscholderton.co.uk

BIODEGRADABLE COFFINS AND SHROUDS

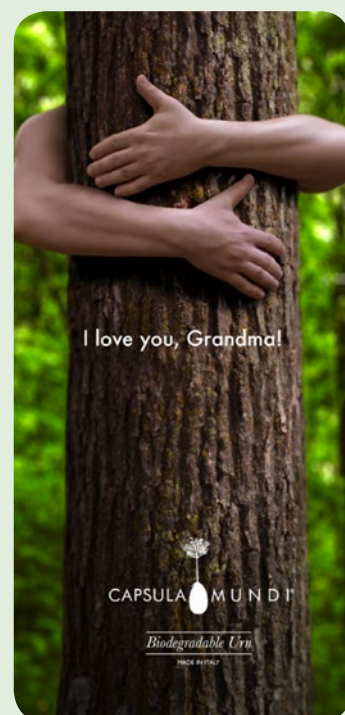
www.bellacouche.com

www.pentiddy.co.uk

www.wickerwillowcoffins.co.uk

www.greenfieldcoffins.co.uk

www.capsulamundi.it/en



WOODLANDS AWARDS 2019

Easy to enter with great prizes to be won, the prestigious Woodlands Awards are back for a third year. **ANTONY MASON** explains how to get involved.

Now in their third year, the Woodlands Awards continue in their mission to celebrate the hard work, the initiatives, the inventiveness and the sheer enjoyment of the woodland world.

And this year we are adding one new category: Best Woodland Dogs!

Awards categories

There are now 15 categories altogether, divided into two groups: awards for individuals (woodland owners and users) and awards for enterprises (woodland organisations, businesses, educational programmes and so on). See the list in the box, right.

How to enter

Each of the categories has its own criteria for entry. Some (such as the Woodland Photography Award, or the new Woodland Dogs Award) depend on individuals submitting their own entries. Some (such as Woodland Courses) depend on personal recommendations. Others still (such as Woodland Blogs) depend on a mixture of these.

The main idea is that they are all easy to enter. Full details are available on www.woodlands.co.uk/woodlands-awards

Deadline for submissions: 31 July 2019.

Any questions? Please email antony@woodlands.co.uk

Winners

A panel of judges will draw up shortlists of the best entries, and then award the prizes. There may be a number of winners in each category (last year there were 54



New for the 2019 Woodlands Awards – a new category of Best Woodland Dogs.

winners altogether): all entries judged to be of equally high merit will be awarded a first prize (i.e. no second, third etc).

The 2019 award winners will be announced in September 2019.

A note to past winners: the competition rules say that winners cannot win an award in the same category for a second time, but there is nothing to stop them entering (or being entered) in another category.

Prizes

The prizes will be a mixture of award certificates, selected woodland books and woodland equipment and/or tools – and recognition!



The Woodlands Awards sponsored by Woodlands.co.uk

Prizes will be awarded in each of the following categories:

Awards for individuals

- Woodland Blogs
- Small Woodland Websites
- Woodland Photography
- Woodland Sculpture
- Woodland Tool Recommendations
- Whole Wood Owners' Coordinators
- Woodland Hair (and/or Beard)
- Woodland Dogs

Awards for enterprises

- Woodland Contractors
- Forest Schools
- Woodland Courses
- Community Woods
- Woodfair Trade Stands
- Woodland Books of the Year
- Regional and National Woodland Organisations

FUELLING THE HEART OF THE FOREST

Community volunteers often revive long-neglected woodlands. In the National Forest, however, volunteers help manage Britain's youngest forest. **HELEN BRALESFORD** of the Heartwood Community Woodfuel Group in the National Forest explains how it all works.

The National Forest is a visionary project which began in the late 1980s and has transformed derelict landscapes scarred by the extractive industries of the Industrial Revolution into green spaces which are now appreciated by locals and tourists alike.

As the first forest to have been created in England for over 1,000 years, the National Forest has specific management requirements. Many of the 8.7 million trees planted over this 200-square mile area are reaching a stage where thinning is required. However, the National Forest Company (NFC) was not set up to be a landholder. Instead, it is a not-for-profit public sector charity sponsored by DEFRA, which oversees the landscape of the forest and works in partnership with landowners, businesses, public, private and voluntary organisations and local communities. Forest owners are diverse, comprising farmers-turned-foresters, small-scale landowners, corporations, and the three local authorities – Leicestershire, Staffordshire and Derbyshire. Funding comes from DEFRA and fundraising.

The Heartwood Community Woodfuel Group has been formed to help with woodland management. Both the cash-strapped local authorities and small-scale woodlanders benefit from the scheme, which was first piloted in 2014 as part of the Black-to-Green Project initiated by the National Forest Company and backed by the Heritage Lottery fund.

Now in its fourth full

“

When I was a kid, we used to sneak into the woods and cut stuff down for bonfire night and put mud on the stumps to disguise our illicit activity. Now we are not only allowed to cut trees down, it is actively encouraged!

”

season, Heartwood serves the area of north-west Leicestershire and south Derbyshire around Moira, Swadlincote and Ashby-de-la-Zouch where planting began a quarter of a century ago – an area known as the Heart of the Forest. The NFC would like to see the scheme expand throughout the region.

Heartwood volunteers give their time and energy to help manage woodlands, receiving firewood in return for their labour. Work includes essential thinning and pruning, the removal of tree guards and, as the skills of members have increased, the creation of long-term management plans, writing grant applications and felling licence applications. Members interested in conservation build and install bat and bird boxes as part of the remit.

With over 50 active members, Heartwood will run over 30 sessions this felling season. To complement regular woodfuel events, training days run throughout the year covering everything from LANTRA

certified chainsaw training to arboreal first-aid, food hygiene (the annual woodland barbecue has become a must!), coppicing, and all-terrain vehicle operation.

The addition of a quad and trailer to the group's tool inventory in 2018 has made work easier. These are used to extract timber which has been cross-cut into metre lengths and is then divided up between members at the end of each session. Despite the popularity of mechanical aids, Heartwood remains reliant on manual labour, with many members



preferring to work using hand tools such as bowsaws and loppers. This means that those who choose to work quietly in the woods still can.

Money grows on trees

Since its inception, Heartwood has steadily increased members' skill levels and refined its management. It is now financially independent of the project that instigated it. Funding to pay for insurance, equipment and training comes from felling grants, and voluntary contributions from members cover essentials such as refreshments. A charcoal retort obtained in 2018 earns its keep, while small-scale sales of excess woodfuel provide another stream of income. For the first time in 2019, timber has been supplied to award-winning craftsman Peter Wood of Greenwood Days who is delighted to be able to source raw materials locally. 'The frightening thing is that I started chairmaking around the time when the wood was planted and I'm now using wood from it! Full circle,' says Peter.

The group is now well-equipped to continue its work but could not have achieved this level of independence without the assistance of many generous partners. The National Forest provides on-going support and is a source of advice, as well as offering opportunities for networking with other groups across the forest. North-West Leicestershire Ranger, Chris Conway, who taught many members how to fell their first tree, continues to work closely with the group. Heartwood also works co-operatively with Community Education and Enterprise Projects (CEEP), a group that supports young people experiencing difficulties in their lives.

Heartwood has collaborated in projects with



Leicestershire County Council at Sarah's Wood, Moira, and at Donisthorpe Woodland Park. It has also worked with South Derbyshire District Council at Lady Diana's Wood near Swadlincote. In the 2017–18 felling season volunteers worked for the first time with the Woodland Trust at Willesley Wood near Ashby. This proved to be mutually beneficial and has expanded in the current season to include work at Woodcote near Ashby. 2018 saw Heartwood contributing to the inaugural award-winning Timber! Festival at Feanedock Wood near Moira where





Heartwood members cross-cut the fruits of a morning's work in the woods.

members demonstrated charcoal burning and supplied woodfuel to other exhibitors.

Why volunteer?

Members are drawn to the group for many reasons. Most simply appreciate the great outdoors, but woodfuellers come from all sorts of backgrounds including caterers, social workers, managers, teachers, engineers and IT specialists. A few already work in forestry.

Many come for the lure of free woodfuel and then stay on for the pleasure that only outdoor work can give, although most have multiple reasons for their participation. Ted Tann-Watson who joined the group at its inception explains:

‘I went along to the initial meeting as a way of getting involved in and improving the local environment. Since then the fuel has become an important part of our household economy.’

Committee member Graham Bowers recalls a misspent youth as part of his motivation:

‘When I was a kid, we used to sneak into the woods and cut stuff down for bonfire night and put mud on the stumps to disguise our illicit activity. Now we are not only allowed to cut trees down, it is actively encouraged!’

Another member recalls being discouraged as a girl from participating in woodland activities and crafts. ‘At school girls didn’t do woodwork. That early negativity left me feeling totally inept with tools. The opportunity to fell a tree didn’t arrive until I was into my fifties when I joined Heartwood. I am really proud now of my chainsaw certificate!’

Anyone is welcome to join the group whatever their skill level. All members are given a thorough induction and partnered with a more experienced workmate when they join. It’s proving to be a valuable scheme on every level, both for the wood and the volunteers.

HEARTWOOD

COMMUNITY WOODFUEL
GROUP

For more information on membership of Heartwood, visit the website at:

www.heartwoodhof.org.uk

National Forest Visitor Information

Timber Festival 5-7 July 2019



DRAW KNIVES

THE SHARPEST TOOLS IN THE BOX

MAURICE PYLE considers one of the most simple, yet useful green woodworking tools. What makes a good draw knife?

The draw knife – what a tool! Draw knives are one of those tools pretty much essential for green woodworking and should be one of the first acquisitions when building up your toolkit. Traditional, simple and vital, they are normally used in conjunction with a shave horse.

Typically, makers would bust a log down into a cleft section, trim up with an axe, then round up with a draw knife on a shave horse. Draw knives are used to prepare billets round in section for the pole lathe, and to create whittled chair, bench and stool components.

We often get asked which tools are essential to get going with green wood craft and I suppose a good axe or hatchet must be at the top of the list, but then you need to look at getting a good draw knife.

According to Wikipedia, the definition of a draw knife is 'a traditional woodworking hand tool used to shape wood by removing shavings. It consists of a blade with a handle at each end. The blade is much longer than it is deep. It is usually pulled or "drawn" toward the user. Because a draw knife is a two-handed tool, the billet needs to be held in a

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***Using a draw knife
on green wood is
one of life's great
satisfactions.***

”

holding device such as a shave horse or a traditional break.'

This rather utilitarian description fails to say that using a draw knife on green wood is one of life's great satisfactions. It's a tool that seems to liberate and soothe. Almost everyone who uses one for the first time comments on how therapeutic the process is. The use of a shave horse and draw knife is a necessary stage to round up a billet in readiness for the pole lathe, but it's just great when a student connects with what is an

incredibly simply constructed tool and sees its full potential in its own right. Mastering the pole lathe to make fine Windsor chairs may be the end game for some people, but with practice, a shave horse and draw knife alone can make the components for beautiful country chairs and stools.

Over the years many variants have appeared, adapted in one way or another for specific work and trades. I'll deal with these variants by flagging up a range of features which you might find in any one draw knife.

Traditional craftspeople such as gunmakers, chair-makers, coopers and handle-makers, all worked with wood, but had

very different requirements, and therefore used a variety of draw knife styles.

Bevel up or bevel down?

The position of the handles determines which way up the tool works – either bevel up or bevel down. If the handles of a draw knife are on the same plane as the blade, then it will normally only work effectively bevel down. In the bevel up position, the user's wrists will feel extremely awkward and the tool will tend to dive deep into the wood.

Handles: dropped, or cranked?

When the steel of the tool beyond the cutting part of the blade is curved down, positioning the hands lower than the blade, the handles are dropped and the bevel is nearly always up. This is a style found both in some older tools and new ones from companies such as German makers Ochsenkopf (Oxhead).

Cranked handles are in the same plane as the blade, but are angled slightly outwards. This type is best used bevel up, but the user's arms are positioned in a slightly more comfortable position.

Cutting edge length

A useful length is about 20cm (8 inches), permitting a straight-on drawing or slicing action. This is perfect for work such as billet preparation or tenon sizing and creating the components for cleft gates. Larger draw knives of 25cm (10 inches) and above are useful for removing bark from small-medium logs. Smaller blades of about 15cm (6 inches) are useful for finer work.

Blades: curved or straight?

A blade that is slightly curved along its length is a less common style. Using it bevel down, it works essentially like every other straight draw knife, but bevel up, it's a great tool to move wood from flat

surfaces such as the bottom of a carved bowl without catching the bowl's edge where it joins the sides.

Cutting edge curved?

Again, not very common. I have a small antique draw knife with a curved edge and it slices beautifully even without skewing the blade towards yourself.

Hollow-ground back?

If the back of a draw knife's blade is hollow-ground (concave), the sharpening steel will sit flat with the edges of the cutting edge, meaning that it will be easier to remove the burr.

Hollow-ground bevel?

A hollow-ground (concave) bevel is not essential, but it makes sharpening an awful lot easier. Hollow grinding can only be achieved with a (usually powered) wheel such as a Tormek sharpening system.

Draw knives are interesting tools. They are really liberating because they are a simple blade and the user is immediately in control of the shaving size (unlike a spokeshave or plane). They can't jam, even when working green, unseasoned wood. I'd always recommend keeping a draw knife as sharp as possible, but even if neglected they will remain effective.

There are some wonderful older draw knives, with great steel and patina, but they are becoming scarcer. Manufacturers such as Gransfors Bruk, Oxhead, Hans Karlsson, Ray Iles and Svante Djarv produce quality new ones, with prices starting at about £50.

Professional green woodworker **MAURICE PYLE** runs Woodsmith Experience, a unique business offering greenwood craft courses and specialist tools for woodcraft and small-scale forestry.
www.woodsmithexperience.co.uk



Svante Djarv draw knife, with handles cranked down, a straight edge, and curved blade.



Using a draw knife with dropped handles to shape a billet on a shave horse.

Oxhead draw knife, with drop-down handles, best used bevel up.



DAN WATSON is inspired by a treasure trove of green woodworking ideas.

SHAVING HORSES, LAP SHAVES, AND OTHER WOODLAND VICES

Sean Hellman

Crafty Little Press

130 pages

400 colour illustrations

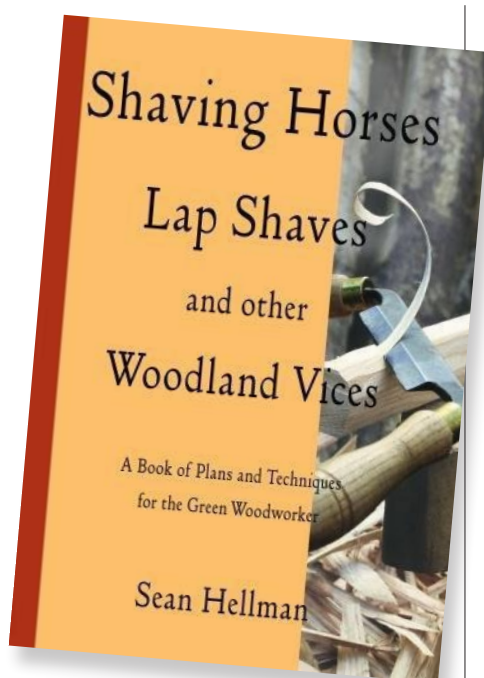
ISBN 978-0993186110

RRP £16.95

I have been coppicing and carrying out woodland crafts for over 20 years, spending a considerable amount of time astride my trusty shave horse and thought I had a pretty good idea about how to hold a bit of wood while shaping my work. However, Sean's book is a veritable treasure trove of ideas and inspiration for crafters of any ability. It is a practical, instructive book with plans, diagrams, and clear working guidance for making shaving horses, the functional, traditional, wooden clamping devices upon which the woodworker sits astride whilst crafting a piece of wood.

Sean has spent most of his working life hand-crafting useful and beautiful items from green wood, learning by doing and through trial and error. He is one of the most skilled and highly respected green woodworkers in the country who, by his own admission, 'fell in love with shaving horses and the tools used for making green wood artefacts'. The use of a shaving horse is only one part in the process of making and it can be adapted to numerous applications, from chair components to gypsy flowers, baskets to cleft fencing rails and many more. The use of a shaving horse often goes hand-in-hand with the necessity to hold and clamp wood in other ways too, and this book also examines a selection of these devices.

Sean looks at the history of shave horse use and goes on to give details about the tools needed to construct your steed. With detailed how-to's for several designs of shave horse



and other devices, the book also discusses the pros and cons of various designs, together with numerous modifications for a variety of uses.

Subtitled 'A Book of Plans and Techniques for the Green Woodworker,' the book contains more than 400 plans, illustrations and photos that make it an excellent reference resource and companion to aid the selection and construction of a shave horse or woodland vice building project. In fact, I would go as far as saying that this book is essential! With the inclusion of useful information on tool sharpening, re-handling, different knife and tool cuts and numerous other nuggets of invaluable information and wisdom gathered during a lifetime of green woodworking, this book is a must for any novice or experienced craft worker. It is the most comprehensive book written on the subject that I have found and is highly recommended – check out other titles on the Crafty Little Press website.

Now, which design should I choose for my next shaving horse?

BOOK REVIEW

NEW AND NOTED GREEN GOLD

Author **GABRIEL HEMERY** talks about *Green Gold* – his novel rooted in the real adventures of 19th-century plant hunter John Jeffrey.

Many readers will be familiar with the exploits of the celebrated plant hunters David Douglas (Douglas fir) and William Lobb (monkey puzzle and giant redwood), but fewer have heard of John Jeffrey. Inspired in particular by David Douglas, the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) set up the 'Oregon Botanical Association' in 1849 and were successful in attracting investors and raising funds to support a three-year expedition. Among more than 100 were several plant nurseries, and prominent individuals and landowners, including Prince Albert and the Duke of Buccleuch.

When Jeffrey set out in 1850, there were high hopes that this 23-year-old would follow in the footsteps of the illustrious David Douglas, with the fruits of his labours paid to the investors as dividends in the form of seeds or plants. Yet the odds were stacked against Jeffrey. The distances to be travelled across British Columbia and the Rocky Mountains were extraordinary, while the territory itself was challenging due to the extreme cold, high altitude, and unrest among Native American tribes. And all this had to be overcome before Jeffrey even reached 'Oregon Country', where he was to start his plant collecting in earnest.

Fate held another card: the impact

of the California Gold Rush. As John Jeffrey travelled southwards from Oregon, through Washington and California, the '49ers started moving north in search of new gold fields. It was a restless and violent time, and there would have been many challenges and temptations for the young explorer, who had never travelled beyond Scotland before.

Tracking Jeffrey

Jeffrey did not send many letters home, yet together with the labels attached to plant specimens and seeds, I have been able to plot his 10,000-mile route across British Columbia, Oregon, Washington, and California. Despite repeated requests, Jeffrey's journals (which he was contracted to keep in duplicate) were never received by RBGE. His supporters became evermore frustrated by his increasingly scant communications, his missing journals, and the poor quality and quantity of some of his botanical collections. Ultimately, in 1854, John Jeffrey was dismissed via a notice in a Californian newspaper! But at the same time he simply disappeared, thought to have been murdered in New Mexico.

John Jeffrey collected at least 400 specimens and the seeds of 199 species, including 35 conifer tree species. Two plants bear his name today: Jeffrey's shooting star (*Dodecatheon jeffreyi*) and Jeffrey pine (*Pinus jeffreyi*). He is also remembered by Mount Jeffrey on Vancouver Island, and by Jeffrey Peak in British Columbia.

The title for *Green Gold* reflects



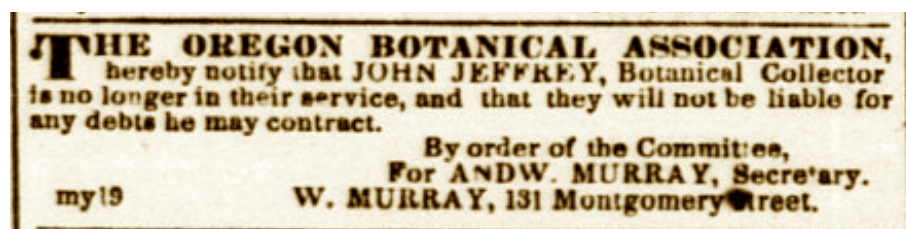
the high value of novel plants to Victorian landowners and gardeners, and the significance of the clash of Jeffrey's expedition with the Gold Rush. It interweaves facts, taken from the minutes, letters and plant labels, with fiction in the form of his missing journals which I really enjoyed imagining.

The exhibition **Green Gold: Plants from the travels of John Jeffrey**

will open at the John Hope Gateway, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh from Saturday 27 April until end June. Open daily from 10am. Free entry.

Green Gold: The Epic True Story of Victorian Plant Hunter John Jeffrey by Gabriel Hemery is published in April by Unbound (£10.99 paperback / £3.99 ebook) www.unbound.com

Gabriel Hemery is chief executive of Sylva Foundation and the author of *The New Sylva*.



SYMBOLS IN TREES

CLARE GIBSON assesses a tree which promises a magical and early sign of spring: the hazel.

It's the time of year when yellow catkins, or lambs' tails, dangle from hazel trees (*Corylus avellana*). The symbolism of the hazel is overwhelmingly positive, and not just because, as a producer of edible hazelnuts, it represents fertility, sustenance and plenty. Those who manage to shatter a tough-to-crack nutshell are rewarded by the nutritious treasure within: metaphorically it is the kernel of wisdom, or of truth, and this is the key to the hazel's symbolism.

The Celts regarded the hazel as the tree of knowledge, whose nuts bestowed wisdom on any who ate them. The early Irish *Dindsenchas* (texts that tell of the lore of places), say of Connla's Well: 'The nine hazels of Crimall the sage drop their fruits yonder under the well: they stand by the power of magic spells under a darksome mist of wizardry.' The hazelnuts that fell into the well's water were eaten by salmon, which absorbed the knowledge and seeds of inspiration that they contained. Anyone who then ate these salmon would also acquire hazelnut-bestowed wisdom, along with the gift of poetry and power of prophecy. This combination of well, hazel trees, hazelnuts and salmon as a potent source of transcendental wisdom recurs frequently in Celtic myth.

Divine dowsing

The hazel's apparently magical properties prompted Druids to use hazel-wood rods – the original 'magic wands' – in their sacred rituals. Hazel remains the preferred wood for forked divining or dowsing rods, which react to water or minerals below the ground, revealing their presence. Although the North American witch hazel (*Hamamelis*) belongs to a different genus of tree, some say that the hazel's association



with magical properties in the Old World was transferred to the New World's *Hamamelis*, as demonstrated by witch-hazel water, an astringent decoction made from *H. virginiana*'s bark and leaves that is still used to treat certain skin complaints.

Under the influence of Christianity, the perception of people who supposedly possessed magical abilities darkened, and those who had once been respected as sages and

wise women became increasingly demonised. Hazel, however, became regarded as an effective tool against the malign influence of demons and witches. In his *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1594), Reginald Scot advised, 'Upon the Sabbath daie before sunrising, cut a hazell wand, saieng: I cut thee O bough of this summers growth, in the name of him whome I meane to beate or maime.'

According to the Brothers Grimm in *Die Haselrute* (*The Hazel Branch*), the Virgin Mary sought the protection of a hazel tree when threatened by an adder, and proclaimed, 'As the hazel-bush has been my protection this time, it shall in future protect others also.' This perhaps explains the old belief that hazels ward off snakes and other creepy-crawlies.

The hazelnut was similarly believed to protect against evil, as well as such ailments as rheumatism and lumbago, which was why many people never ventured out without a hazelnut safely stashed in a pocket.

Their association with fertility, and thus with love, meant that hazelnuts were often used to represent lovers and, through a baptism of fire, to predict the course of their relationship. Two named hazelnuts symbolising a courting couple were traditionally tossed on to a fire on Hallowe'en ('Nut-crack Night'); it was said that if both burned steadily, the lovers would remain ardent and constant; if either hazelnut jumped or cracked in the heat of the flames, however, its namesake would be fickle. Dispiriting as such an outcome may be, the hazel's prophetic powers at least meant that forewarned was forearmed.

Symbolically a provider of prophecy, wisdom, protection – and more – the hazel is a magical tree, which is worth considering next time you examine a hazel coppice or crack open a hazelnut.



Detail from a woodcut, *De re metallica libri XII*, Georgius Agricolas, 1556. (Wiki Commons)

EVENTS ROUND-UP

2019

MAY

THE ARB SHOW

17–18 May 2019

Westonbirt Arboretum, Gloucestershire

WEIRD AND WONDERFUL WOOD

18–19 May 2019

Stowmarket, Suffolk

DEVON COUNTY SHOW

16–18 May 2019

Clyst St Mary, Exeter; Devon

WOOD FESTIVAL

17–19 May 2019

Brazier's Park, Ipsden, Oxfordshire

THE BUSHCRAFT SHOW

25–27 May 2019

Beehive Farm, Rosliston, Derbyshire

ROYAL BATH & WEST SHOW

29 May–1 June 2019

Shepton Mallet, Somerset

JUNE

WEALD AND DOWNLAND MUSEUM

15–16 June 2019

Chichester; West Sussex



ROYAL HIGHLAND SHOW

20–23 June 2019

Edinburgh, Scotland

JULY

TIMBER FESTIVAL

5–7 July 2019

Feanedock, National Forest

OPUS WOOD AND CRAFT FAIR

6–7 July 2019 Burrowbridge, Somerset

GREAT YORKSHIRE SHOW

9–11 July 2019

Great Yorkshire Showground, Harrogate

WOODFEST COUNTRY SHOW

12–14 July 2019

St Asaph, Denbighshire, Wales

STRUMPSHAW TREE FAIR

20–21 July 2019, Strumpshaw, Norfolk

ROYAL WELSH SHOW

22–25 July 2019

Builth Wells, Wales

NEW FOREST AND HAMPSHIRE COUNTY SHOW

30 July–1 August 2019

Brockenhurst, Hampshire

AUGUST

SOUTH DOWNS SHOW

17–18 August 2019

Queen Elizabeth Country Park,
Petersfield, Hampshire

WILDERNESS GATHERING

15–18 August 2019

West Knoyle, Wiltshire

STOCK GAYLARD OAK FAIR

24–25 August 2019

Sturminster Newton, Dorset

SEPTEMBER

WYCHWOOD FOREST FAIR

2 September 2019

Charlbury, Oxfordshire

CONFOR WOODLAND SHOW

5–6 September 2019, Longleat, Wiltshire

BELMONT WOODFEST & COUNTRY FAIR

7–8 September 2019 Faversham, Kent

SURREY HILLS WOOD FAIR

5–6 October 2019, Cranleigh, Guildford



SPRING COURSES & WORKSHOPS

Royal Forestry Society

Tree Health: pests & diseases

Friday 12 April, Berkhamsted

Tutor: Adam Sharman

£65 RFS members/£75 non-members

Grading & Measuring Timber

Friday 10 May, Herefordshire

Tutor: Gavin Munro.

£75 RFS members/£85 non-members

Essential Guide to Caring for your Wood

Wednesday 12 June, Hampshire

Tutor: Professor Julian Evans

£60 RFS members/£70 non-members.

An Introduction to Soil Identification for Foresters, Thursday 27 June

Alice Holt, Surrey

Tutor: Andy Moffat

£125 RFS members/£150 non-members

Essentials for Measuring your Trees and Woods, Friday 12 September

Lowther Estate, Penrith

Tutor: Mike Jones.

£70 RFS members/£80 non members

RFS Building with timber in small woods

Friday 05 July 2019

Checkendon, South Oxfordshire

Instructors: Ken Hume and Herbert Russell of the Oxfordshire Woodland Group £60 RFS members /£70 non RFS members

To book www.rfs.org.uk/events/training-courses

Centre For Alternative Technology (CAT)

Courses and workshops on sustainable woodland management, social forestry (OCN accredited), horse logging,

mindful woodland management, and connecting with trees.

Sustainable building, renewable power, organic gardening and wilderness skills. Machynlleth, Wales.

Tel: 01654 704952

www.cat.org.uk

Rural Development Initiative Courses

Woodfuel and timber supply chain training

The Ignite Woodfuel Quality Standards one-day course introduces woodfuel suppliers and users to the full range of standards and quality assurance schemes in use in the supply chain and how to produce and specify the correct type of fuel.

3 April HETAS, Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire

11 April Livius Training Centre, Boroughbridge, Yorkshire

17 April J36 Rural Auction Centre, Milnthorpe, Cumbria

1 May The Forest Centre, Marston Moretaine, Bedfordshire

9 May Strathearn Community Campus, Crieff, Scotland

Firewood Production and Supply for both existing and fledgling firewood businesses.

Thursday 2 May The Forest Centre, Marston Moretaine, Bedfordshire

Ignite courses cost £150+VAT per day which includes the LANTRA Awards certification fee, course materials, lunch and refreshments. To book a place call 01765 609355, or email Erica at erica.spencer@ruraldevelopment.org.uk. www.ruraldevelopment.org.uk



Measuring the girth of a Radiata Pine, Australia. (Courtesy: CSIRO Science Library)

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Bat Conservation Trust
Capsula Mundi
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University of California biologists Cameron Williams and Rikke Naesborg measure the trunk diameter of a giant sequoia in Giant Forest, Sequoia National Park. (Courtesy: Anthony R. Ambrose)