

BHMAT NEWSLETTER

Coppice Apprenticeships – Training for Coppice Woodland Futures

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Apprentice update

We are delighted to welcome two new apprentices since the last newsletter. Sam Robinson joined Ian Taylor at Lakeland Coppice Products in July and Lorna Singleton started with Rebecca Oaks in September. They are both funded by the Cumbria Fells and Dales Leader programme which administers funds from the Rural Development Programme England (RDPE). Sam Ansell is also funded through this scheme, although his bursary has been supported by Arnside / Silverdale AONB Sustainability Fund, match funding is provided by the Headley Trust and comes via the Small Woods Association (Nobody ever said this funding business was easy and straightforward!)

We are immensely grateful to all these funders. Meanwhile Mike Carswell has gone down to two days a week with Rebecca as he builds up his business in Manchester. Peter Wood gave an excellent presentation of his business at Woodland Pioneers and will soon be going it alone in the North East. The final gathering for a group photo at Woodland Pioneers provided a perfect occasion to present graduate apprentices Rupert Hoskinson and Helen Elvin with their Bill Hogarth Diplomas. ? people have completed their Woodland Pioneers certificates and so we have an eager group of potential apprentices if we can track down some further funding.

AGM 15th
November 2010
Gilpin Bridge,
Witherslack

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Woodland Pioneers 2010

This year's Woodland Pioneers course was yet again superb. A wet start on Monday didn't dampen the spirit much, then it was full steam ahead throughout a mainly sunny and fun week. The different courses held were:



Coppicing with Rebecca Oaks

Rebecca walked her students through the woods, discussing coppicing history and skills. Then everyone was set to cutting back hazel with bow saws, billhooks and axes to create stools which will grow back next year. The cut-down branches and poles would then be used for making hurdles, hedging stakes, pea sticks and more. The tree regrowth needed to be protected against browsing deer by building up dead-hedges around each stool using the unwanted brush stripped from the poles. Lets hope the deer (and rabbits) don't get in there next year. After that the new shoots should be tall enough to be above browsing range.

Riven Oak Panels with Owen Jones



Owen showed how boiled lengths of split oak can be riven (split) into thinner and thinner pieces until they become very pliable when kept damp. Rectangular frames were then made in groups and the riven oak woven onto the frame to make a panel. This method of riving oak is also used by Owen during the process of making oak swill baskets.

Rustic Stools with Ian Taylor and Sam Robinson

Everyone began with an oak log about 2 feet long and split it in half. They then used one half to make 4 (or 3 or 6!) legs and the other half to split, axe and adze down to make a seat. Mortice holes were drilled into the seats at the correct angle and the axed legs were inserted. Finally the legs were levelled off to result in some very beautiful pieces of rustic furniture.

Treen with Paula and Twiggy

Twiggy and Paula guided everyone through the making of gypsy clothes pegs, coat hooks, gypsy flowers and tent pegs. Students used axes, draw knives and whittling knives to shape their beautiful pieces. These are great projects that can be done at home with very few tools and little time - although not as easy as they seem!



Making a Shave Horse with Maurice Pyle and Peter Wood

A wide range of skills were used in the making of each shave horse: pole lathe turning to make the 4 pins (3 for the frame and one to hold the board); splitting, axing and draw-kniving the bed, arms and legs. Then all the peices were fitted together to make one of the most used tools in the green-wood-working workshop!

Stick Chairs with James Mitchell

An intensive course where keeping it simple was definitely helpful if you wanted to get your chair finished. Most of the chair frames were made from rods in the round, taking advantage of interesting forks, bends and twists, while others shaped their back rests and other sections. Some seats were woven using natural cord, others had lined up small-diameter hazel rods nailed in place, others had split oak heartwood nailed to the frame. There was a gorgeous coffee table made with the same principles and a well-contoured bar stool with a made-to-measure seat!



Traditional Earthburn with Brian Crawley

This method of making charcoal is the old, traditional way. Similar in principle to other methods, but more artful. It needed to be watched constantly over the 36 hour period of the burn, and that was after spending a wet day stacking the wood and covering it in turf. A couple of bucket-fulls of fire were tipped down the hole in the middle, followed by more wood and a turf lid. The burn was shut down by dowsing with just the right amount of water and then removing the turf - enough water to extinguish but not too much to dampen the charcoal. Some of the charcoal was then used to fire the Thursday night barbeque and the brown-ends (the partially burnt wood bi-product) helped to keep the hot water boiling on Friday. The last few photos are of the barrel burns that the group "played with" in their "spare" time!

As Peter Wood is nearing the end of his apprenticeship and as part of his final year he presented his handywork to the crowd on Tuesday night. A great talk described how he had spent his 3 years learning, experimenting and creating. For example, he explained how he had cut down a tree and turned it into charcoal. He then made a small forge and fired it with his charcoal to create some bowl-turning chisels. Then he cut down another tree and used his newly-made chisels to turn bowls and a goblet. Very self-sufficient and sustainable. And impressive.



What a wonderful place Chapel House Woods are to pitch your tent, relax (between courses, of course!) and chat with like-minded people. This year hosted "Kath and Tony's Cafe" which was the place to be under cover in the woods where participants could get some tea, coffee, cake, laughs and chats. Thanks to all for coming and making the week a memorable experience. And thanks to Phil and Rosie for the lovely grub and Anne Kenyon for the lovely cakes.

If you want to see more pictures then go to the website and click the "pioneer" link on the left, then click the "Woodland Pioneers 2010" picture. Tony Morgan



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Report from the South East Coppice Conference

Thirty odd tents full of happy campers in October? Must be coppice workers! Lodge Hill was the venue for the latest Coppice conference, a large conference centre on top of the ridge at Waterfield in West Sussex, facing South across the Weald to the Downs. This event had been suggested at the conference held a year previously in Cumbria, in the interests of cross-regional understanding, and I personally was really keen to learn about the condition of the woods and the workers down South.

The first day began informally in the afternoon, with a couple of have-a-go sessions - I learned how to make a tent peg with a stock knife, and was reassured by being told it was the worst one I would ever make. We also learned from Alan Waters how to get the most out of your birch brush – pimp it up! Then followed an auction of tools, materials, bits of wood and boxes of tat. There were some good bargains to be had, but the high quality items mostly went for fair prices.

Thursday was all about Hazel – and after a few short presentations in the hall we piled into battered old Landrovers and chugged off to the site visits. It was revealing to compare two sites – one managed by the local Wildlife Trust, and the other managed by Alan Waters. Both were well stocked and mostly pure Hazel coppice, with fairly few standards, although the latter was in the process of restoration. The impression that I got was that the Trust wood, managed and worked by volunteers, was keeping the coppice rotation going but failing to use the product effectively. Alan Waters' coppice, however, demonstrated that markets and products can be found for almost every scrap of wood, if you apply a bit of enterprise.

Friday was Sweet Chestnut focused, and with a visit to a paling fence manufacturer, a site visit to watch a couple of workers peeling, cleaving and pointing the palings in the wood, and a quick peek at one of Ben Laws round timber chestnut buildings. The chestnut industry certainly seems to be a lot more specialised, with some large firms, but there are also many independent coppice workers involved.

The evening sessions allowed for some open discussion about issues facing the coppice sector, including the possibility of a national Coppice Association. It's fair to say that the issue seems to be complex, and several people I spoke to afterwards were surprised by the intensity of feeling. Finding agreement when there are so many different parties involved is rarely easy, and the conference finally resolved to send delegates up to the next meeting of the steering group at the Greenwood Centre.

I found the whole event very interesting, and was really pleased to meet many dedicated and passionate coppice workers. Although there may have been some contentious issues in the discussion

sessions, I can report that there was plenty of agreement taking place around the campfire!

Sam Ansell

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Cumbria Woodlands,
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Naturesave Trust,
Dulverton Trust, Earnest
Cooke Trust, Sir John
Fisher Foundation*

We are very sorry to announce the death of Alan Shepley MBE. Alan was secretary of Coppice Association North West for many years and worked tirelessly for the coppice industry, especially in North West of England. He was a driving force behind the two most recent coppice conferences that CANW produced and up to his untimely death was, in his role as Secretary of Wood Education Programme, promoting the Cumbria Wood and Forest Festival. BHMAT will hope to continue to work with Alan's widow Marian to tend the hazel coppice plantation that we established as a trial plot on their land at Todd's Lot. Our sympathy to Marian at this sad time.

