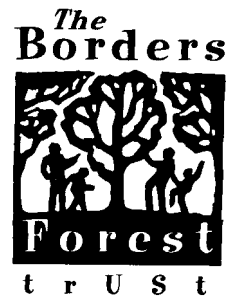




The Green Shed



Spring 2010 Issue 25

News from the Borders Forest Trust

Success with young trainees and volunteers



Chainsaw training in action

Making our local woodlands accessible to all is a key part of Borders Forest Trust's work. Last year we were awarded funding to start an exciting new project which focuses on training young people in land management skills and also encourages people of all ages to volunteer in our Borders woodlands.

Many volunteers, trainees and community woodland groups have now greatly benefited from the Woodland Volunteering and Youth Training project. Organisations such as Apex Borders, Ways 2 Work, Volunteer Centre Borders and several colleges have referred volunteers and trainees to the project.

Every Wednesday, volunteers are picked up by mini-bus and they have been working tirelessly throughout the community woodlands, participating in tasks such as pruning, tree tube removal, tree planting and path maintenance. Woodland groups have had management tasks undertaken which in some circumstances would

have been very arduous to complete themselves.

The training aspect of the project involves five young people working towards qualifications over a six month period. The trainees have completed courses in quad bike driving, chainsaw maintenance and crosscutting, pesticide spraying, woodland management and strimming and brushcutting.

A number of our trainees have now enrolled in full time education or gained employment, and feedback received is very encouraging. Please see alongside for a selection of comments from our hard-working volunteers. Thanks to Forestry Commission Scotland, Lloyds TSB, Voluntary Action Fund, Skills Development Scotland, The Blackford Trust, the Hugh Fraser Foundation and the Scottish Government and European Community Scottish Borders Leader 2007 – 2013 Programme for funding this valuable project.

Lisa Brydon

What our woodland volunteers are saying:

Ashley

When I was told I was to go out one day a week on placement, with Borders Forest Trust, I was really worried, as I have never done anything like that before. However I found that I really enjoyed my time and Lisa was really brilliant with us all. I have learned loads about the woods and the need for these to be looked after! The best part for me is sunny days and the chat, the worst is the snow and freezing weather; however Lisa manages to keep us all going.

Tracy Hall, Employment Dev. Advisor, Apex Scotland

I have found the Borders Forest Trust day to be invaluable, not only for myself but the young people I work alongside. I have enjoyed watching the young people work as part of a team and have witnessed their confidence growing whilst learning new skills. I can confidently say that these skills are being transferred into day to day life skills and employability. I would also like to thank groups such as the Wooplaw Community Woodland for their time and patience - Bob and the gang have been a source of wit and wisdom for all, and had a positive impact on the young people.



Rhoddi bashing at Lindinny

A Word from the Chairman



At the start of the year, it is good for any organisation to look back at what has happened during the previous twelve months. A year ago in early 2009 BFT was faced with two daunting challenges – firstly to raise the purchase price for Corehead Farm and secondly to fund the substantial gap that existed between our predicted income and expenditure. That we managed both of these was a great achievement (not to say relief!) and was only realised thanks to the generous support of our members, other individuals and various organisations.

Our success last year has encouraged us to plan an ambitious programme of work for 2010. This includes starting the ecological restoration of Corehead which will be very exciting as well as expanding our education and training work. We welcome Barry Roberts as our new Woodland Site Manager, an important post which we have not been able to afford for more than a year. This should enable us to take forward a number of large native woodland projects in partnership with private landowners. We still have a lot of funds to raise to ensure we can deliver all of this but we shall press on hopefully.

The last twelve months have shown just how important you, our members, are to the Trust - not just through your subscriptions and donations, or the practical help many of you give but because your support strengthens our credibility and spreads the word. We shall be trying hard to increase our membership this year and if each one of you could recruit one additional member what a difference that would make!

I look forward to seeing some of you at our AGM in June. We try to make this an enjoyable occasion and I hope you will be able to come.

John Hunt

News from BFT

Welcome to the Spring edition of the Green Shed. As you might expect, the winter snowfall gets a mention in quite a few of our articles this issue. But now that spring is in the air (fingers crossed), things are busier than ever. We hope you'll enjoy reading about progress on all our projects and do hope you might be able to join us at our Open Day, AGM or other special events. Thanks for all your support and do get in touch if you'd like to get more involved.

Environment Minister pays a visit

The Environment Minister, Roseanna Cunningham MSP, visited Borders Forest Trust for the first time just before Christmas. Director Willie McGhee gave a short presentation about all aspects of the Trust's work and afterwards the Minister visited Real Wood Studios. Despite the rain and the mud, Ms Cunningham seemed to enjoy the visit, saying "Borders Forest Trust is carrying out some excellent work in the area of native woodland restoration and it was interesting to hear their plans to develop a number of important projects across the south of Scotland."



Roseanna Cunningham with BFT Director Willie McGhee and Stephen Finch of Real Wood Studios

Staff Changes

The Trust is pleased to welcome Barry Roberts as our new Native Woodland Site Manager. Barry is relocating to the Borders from the Wirral and he joins us from a community forestry role with the Mersey Forest. We look forward to having him as part of the team.

Projects Manager Nicola Hunt will be going on maternity leave in early April. A vital member of staff, she will be very much missed in the office and we all wish her well.

BFT Conference: Opportunities for Ecological Restoration

The hot topic of ecological restoration comes under the microscope on 25th March at Peebles Hydro Hotel, when BFT will host a one-day special conference. Speakers include James Aronson from the Center for Functional and Evolutionary Ecology (CNRS) in Montpellier, France, where he serves as head of the Restoration Ecology Group, Dave Fairlamb of RSPB, Des Thomson of Scottish Natural Heritage, Rob Soutar from Forest Enterprise Scotland, and Alastair Laverty from the Tweed Forum.

Fee per place is £55 (students/unwaged £15; price includes lunch) with a special rate of £40 for BFT members and community groups. Visit the website for a full conference programme and booking form. The conference is supported by Scottish Natural Heritage.

2010 AGM

We hope you'll be able to join us at this year's AGM which will be held at 7pm, Thursday 10th June at The Townhouse Hotel, Melrose. Our guest speaker this year will be George Anderson, President of the Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society. The Beechgrove Garden presenter and former Head of the School of Horticulture at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh will be sharing his experiences in a talk entitled 50 Years of Tree Planting.

Are you interested in becoming a BFT Trustee?

Three of our Trustees are standing down at the AGM. Daphne Jackson and Brenda Robertson have completed six years and sadly must now leave us for a while. Neil Campbell has completed three years but is eligible for re-election and will be putting his name forward again. The Trust is now seeking nominations from people with the enthusiasm, energy and experience required to be an effective Trustee. Nominations should be addressed to the Company Secretary and must be received at the BFT office by Friday 30th April (42 days before the AGM). Please contact the office for a nomination form and further information. Should we receive more nominations that vacancies, voting forms will be sent out with the AGM papers.

John Muir Trust

Inside this issue of the Green Shed you'll find a John Muir Trust membership leaflet. The John Muir Trust was founded in 1983 to safeguard the future of wild lands against development and to promote awareness of the value of wild places. BFT has worked in partnership with the Trust on a number of projects, including the Carrifran Wildwood and last year, John Muir Trust members gave our Corehead fundraising appeal a real boost, helping us to meet our target. We are very grateful for all their support. If you are interested in supporting them join on line at www.jmt.org or with the enclosed leaflet.



John Muir Trust wild land - Gorge Glen Nevis by Alex Gillespie

Skills Development Scotland Funding

The Trust was delighted to receive funding of £5000 from Skills Development Scotland (SDS) to run a woodland skills training scheme aimed at unemployed young people aged 16-19. This ten week programme is now being run alongside our Woodland Youth Training & Volunteering project, with Community Woodland Officer Lisa Brydon helping the young people to gain their qualifications. Our thanks go to Alastair Paul of SDS who was instrumental in setting up the project.

BFT Family Fun Day

Another date for your diary is Sunday 22nd August when the BFT annual open day will take place at Gordon Community Woodland. From 11am to 3pm we'll be laying on an exciting range of woodland craft activities. Full details will be posted on the website nearer the time.

Corehead Google Group

A Corehead Google Group has been set up where Borders Forest Trust members can share information, discussions, photographs, events and plans about the project. To become a member please email BFT volunteer Peter Dreghorn on pbdreghorn@btinternet.com

We are planning a special Stakeholder Day for major donors at Corehead in July and a general Open Day later in the summer – further details to follow.

LEADER

2007–2013 update

One of BFT's funders, the Scottish Borders LEADER Programme has awarded almost £1m to 33 local projects. LEADER supports innovative, community led projects and can fund up to 50% of a project's costs. Eligible activity includes: tourism, business networking, marketing and adoption of new technologies.

2010 application deadlines for the Scottish Borders LEADER Programme are 25 March, 24 June and 20 October. For more information visit www.scottishbordersleader.co.uk

The Cabinet Secretary recently announced that some areas previously funded by 'Rural Priorities', namely Community Services and Facilities, Local Development Strategies would be moving to LEADER. This is still being discussed and anyone with projects should continue to follow the Rural Priorities route.



Local groups benefitting from LEADER funding

The Carrifran Wildwood



Carrifran boundary wardens (Photo: John Savory)

Over the winter period, tree planting has been our main occupation although the snow often held us back. The majority of trees planted by volunteers were sessile oak and hawthorn. We collected the acorns from two distinct areas, Glentrool in Dumfries and Galloway and a high altitude oakwood in the Lake District. The latter came from a much more exposed site than the Glentrool ones so they were selected for high planting on the light bracken around the heather line. The other oaks were planted lower down in bracken areas. Reluctantly we decided to use herbicide on the bracken in limited areas to assist establishment, since our worst mortality of trees at Carrifran has been in heavy bracken in spite of strenuous efforts to control it by hand. Some hawthorn were also planted in the same area as the oak, but in general were spread across the site to enrich diversity.

Wildwood volunteer Michael Matthews had grown on some honeysuckle from seed which he had collected and has now started to plant them out under the taller established trees. The honeysuckle will encourage insects, especially bees. In addition, just over 100 burnet rose were planted high up at Windy Bluff by hardy volunteers on one of the Sunday work days.

Contractor Keith Threadgall was going to plant juniper, hazel, gean, willow and hawthorn over Todcastles prior to Christmas but I am sure none of us will forget the snow we had in the area over the winter months. Keith was delayed by over six weeks but he will manage to complete planting by the end of March.

A further 5,600 trees have been ordered; a mix of willow species, juniper, alder and hazel. Some 3,000 will be planted by contractors and it is hoped the rest by volunteers. A selected 1,500 juniper are destined to go up to Firth Hope for the High Planting Weekend on March 27th and 28th led by Hugh Chalmers (a blast from the past) who just can't keep away from the hill tops. It is hoped that plenty of people will join him to ensure we have a productive weekend. There will also be low level planting available for those who do not wish to go up to 700m.

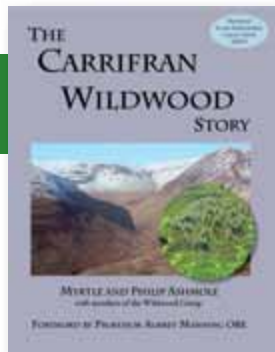
Two large groups came to help plant in October, The Lothian Conservation Volunteers and Edinburgh University's "Dirty Weekenders". As ever the boundary wardens have done their bit by patrolling the 12km fence line and reporting back any problems or significant sightings or bird strikes. Volunteer stalkers have also been out on several occasions, even if nothing is seen their reports help establish a picture of the deer and other wildlife

activity, all very valuable. Other activities have included removing redundant vole guards. These are reused on other parts of the site where possible although many of them are too brittle. Tree tubes have also been removed from well established trees and again these have been reused on other parts of the site. In the long term all tubes will be removed as well as all the vole guards on exposed areas or near water courses. Apart from improving the appearance of the valley, this will reduce the amount of plastic reaching the rivers and eventually the sea. This spring sees the end of 10 years of grant funding from Scottish Natural Heritage for the Wildwood Officer's post. Our thanks go to SNH and Jonathan Warren for this support over the years which has been a real boost to the project and helped to involve thousands of people in the restoration of the Wildwood at Carrifran.

George Moffat



Downy willows and junipers in high enclosure at 690 m



The Carrifran Wildwood Story

The Carrifran Wildwood Story: ecological restoration from the grass roots written by Myrtle and Philip Ashmole with members of the Wildwood Group and with a foreword by Professor Aubrey Manning OBE is now on sale. Supported by Scottish Natural Heritage.

Full colour with 220 photographs; illustrations and maps by nine contributors, including Darren Woodhead and John Busby; 'Boxes' by over 30 contributors. Standard Price £15, Gift Aid price £25, plus £5 p&p. Available from BFT (send a cheque, buy online at www.bordersforesttrust.org, or telephone 01835 830750).

Volunteering at Carrifran Wildwood

Volunteer Sunday: 21st March 2010

Meet at 10am at Carrifran car park, on A708 Moffat to Selkirk road, grid reference NT 159115.

Please bring weatherproof clothing, boots and a packed lunch, and be prepared for a fairly strenuous day. For more details contact George Moffat: george@bordersforesttrust.org Tel: 01835 830750 Mob: 07939 784387

Please note that after March 2010 we shall probably not organise monthly volunteer Sundays, though parties of volunteers will always be welcome by arrangement.

High planting weekend: 27th/28th March 2010

Hugh Chalmers will be leading the only high camp this spring, at 650 m in Firth Hope. We hope to add at least 1000 trees to the unique treeline woodland planted in the last three years. If you would like to camp on the Saturday night, please contact hughchalmers@live.co.uk You can also come for the day on the Saturday or Sunday, meeting at the car park at 10 am, but please let us know in advance (email philip@ashmole.org.uk).

Ecological stoves in Chiapas, Mexico:



Ecological stoves making a difference in Mexico

Improving women's health and helping woodland conservation

Celia Ruiz de Oña Plaza, a friend of our Community Woodland Officer Lisa Brydon, gives an insight into woodland conservation overseas.

Chiapas is the southernmost state in Mexico and is blessed with natural richness. Old cloud forests, tropical jungles, waterfalls, mangroves and many endemic species make of this area of the world an important biodiversity hotspot. However, it is the poorest state in the country. People make their living out of basic crops such as maize, beans and pumpkins and complex social, religious, political and land tenure conflicts are common.

Practically all the families cook with firewood in the traditional three stone open fires. Smoke remains inside the house where women and their children breathe it continuously. According to the World Health Organization, smoke in the kitchen kills 1.5 million children and women every year and causes serious lung and eye diseases (WHO 2006). Quality firewood is scarce and women spend a lot of time collecting it, often getting the green, smoky and soft firewood that produces a highly pollutant smoke.

Against this background, a local NGO called Ambio (www.ambio.mx) worked with local women to install ecological stoves that reduce firewood consumption and ensure that smoke is emitted outside the house. Ambio promotes the establishment of agroforestry and forestry systems for carbon sequestration in community woodlands and also in individual campesino plots. Each community in Chiapas owns its own forest, but many of these are becoming severely reduced due to increasing population pressure and firewood and timber needs.

To continue with this valuable work and with funding from the Spanish aid agency Manos Unidas, our little team of three, with the help of many volunteers, managed to provide the materials and the knowledge to install 300 high quality ecological stoves. We conducted several workshops, first to raise awareness of the danger of smoke in the kitchen and secondly to emphasize the importance of caring for natural resources for the future. We instructed local men on building the stove in the proper way and we also engaged local women as promoters and technicians. These women became the soul of the project and the key to its success. During the following six months, we measured a 50% reduction of firewood consumption in the models that were properly built and pollutant emissions were down to nearly zero.

We are aware that many more stoves will be needed to produce a noticeable impact on forests resources and on population health, but we also know that stemming from this experience other initiatives are underway with the communities leading them on their own. We learnt that building trustful and respectful relations is the only way to work together towards conservation.

Celia Ruiz de Oña Plaza

Progress at Corehead

The task of putting native trees back on the land at Corehead was begun in earnest by a group of enthusiastic children and adults on the 28th of November with some 50 people turning up on a glorious winter's day; dry, cold, clear and sunny. The rowan, birch and alder trees had been bought as part of land purchase sponsorship by Moffat school pupils, through the offices of Peter Dreghorn. Peter is one of BFT's supporters and volunteers in the Annan Water Valley and has been involved in securing land purchase finance and in volunteer assistance and event organising.

The experience of owning free range, hill roaming Blackface sheep during one of the coldest and snowiest periods in living memory has given the Trust a whole new insight into the travails and worries of upland farmers. With deep snow lying across the Southern Uplands, and temperatures down to minus fifteen, our sheep were watched over by John Hume and Mike Baker and looked after by neighbouring farmers, the Ryder brothers. They have been feeding the Blackies concentrate blocks and, in early January, haylage (cross between hay and silage). Thanks to Brian and Andy Ryder for all their work through this difficult period.

While the land at Corehead was deep and crisp and even, Nicola Hunt, our Projects Manager, was co-ordinating a heroic effort to submit an application to the Scottish Government for over

£1 million of grant funding through the Scottish Rural Development Programme. She was ably assisted by our Chairman, John Hunt, who put together a Moorland Management Plan, a Bracken Management Plan and an Inbye Grazing Management Plan. Thanks are also due to Wendy Fenton for agri-environment expertise.

This grant funding, if secured, will be spread over a five year period - from 2010 to 2015. It will allow the Trust to clothe three valleys in native woodland; reduce stock grazing on the higher ground on Hartfell; create species rich hay meadows on the inbye land close to the farmhouse and to do some modest drain blocking to wet up already rushy land near the Annan Water. Let's keep our fingers crossed.

We have been fortunate to have obtained two years of funding to employ a Corehead Site Manager. The post is being part-financed by the Scottish Government and the European Community, Dumfries & Galloway Leader 2007 – 2013 Programme and also by Scottish Natural Heritage. The Manager's job will be to oversee many practical tasks on the farm and to work closely with the local community in activities such as volunteering, educational visits and training. A big thank you from the Trust to SNH and the D&G LEADER folk.

Willie McGhee



Planting among remnant woodland at Corehead

First planting at Corehead

After the November floods would it work?

But the day pupated with a drying sun, through the murk

50 children and adults vaulted the chocolate mud

To see for the first time, the never dry Tweedhope waterfall..... then thud!

The mattock swung and the spear thrust

As a new border forest became entrusted.

With a hundreds trees we made a start, quite well

At the foot of that giant upland, part of which we own, Hartfell.

Corehead Steering Group, Trustees and Staff

Rallied round and some were even heard to laugh

But with delight, at children's voices and one, seven, who said with ease

"I know what we're doing making a forest – with our trees!"

The other beauty of it was that the rowan and hazel were bought

By them, but half the money went to the place where they were taught,

Alba Trees donated a 1000 (of which we planted 10%)

Towards the purchase of this land, so well kent.

The last prize was a set of gloss pictures in a magazine fold

In "D and G Life", which last year, Scotland's best stories told.

As a volunteer this was a day realised

And the landscape change begins to materialise.....

Peter Dreghorn

Volunteer, Adamsholm, Annan Water

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Community Woodlands

Darnick Community Woodland

A keen gang of volunteers planted 30 standard trees at Darnick Community Woodland in early February. These trees were the first to be planted in the new field adjacent to the existing community woodland. Volunteers from Apex Borders, Ways 2 work and Volunteer Centre Borders helped with the planting which proved harder than first anticipated! Even a covering of snow didn't deter the group and with help from community woodland members Jimmy Wintrup and Brenda Robertson all the trees were successfully planted in the ground. Well done all concerned! The woodland group has organised a community planting day for Sunday 14th March at 1pm. Please feel free to come along and help, everyone is welcome!

Venlaw Community Woodland

Venlaw Community Woodland members are very pleased with the recent notification of their successful funding application through the Scottish Community Foundation. Approximately £1,500 has been secured to allow urgent tree surgery work to be done throughout the woodland, together with funding to purchase a chainsaw and personal protective equipment to allow a newly trained member carry out crosscutting works throughout the woodland.

Kelso Community Woodland

Trainees on Lisa's Woodland Volunteering and Youth Training project installed wildlife interpretation panels at both Wooden Anna and Broomlands Community Woodlands in Kelso in mid-November. Thanks go to Awards for All for funding the signs together with money for the urgent tree surgery work carried out in Broomlands earlier in 2009.

Gordon Community Woodland

In early December Gordon Community Woodland held a wood sculpture workshop run by Jeremy Cunningham. This workshop was made possible through funding obtained from the Forestry for People Scottish Rural Development Programme. A total of ten people participated and the workshop proved to be a great success. Although the sculptures were not totally finished, the pieces will be worked on as and when members have time. It was realised by all participants during the workshop that working with oak is not an easy task and it was incredibly hard on both chisels and humans! Through the workshop the participants learned how to work with gouges, chisels and axes along with Jeremy's invaluable advice. A good day was had by all! Gordon Woodland also benefited from the donation of money to plant native trees alongside the all ability path near the front car park. Volunteers went out on a dreary Wednesday in early December and planted a mixture of Alder, Rowan, Hazel and Cherry.

Borders Community Woodland Forum

A meeting was held in late October for the Borders Community Woodland Forum at Borders Forest Trust offices. A total of seven community woodlands were represented with twelve members present. All members insisted that the forum should still continue with a couple of meetings per year to discuss and exchange valuable information. Training was organised for members who required it at the end of the year through funding from the Forestry for People and events will continue for the next two years in the various woodlands throughout the region.

Lisa Brydon



Gordon wood sculpture workshop



February planting at Darnick



The Castle Tree - short in stature, reduced crown and totally hollow

Tree Hunting

Come and join us for some tree hugging fun to hunt for the best of the Borders trees. We are going to hold a tree hunt day on Saturday 15th May at 10am, starting in the designed landscape grounds of Abbotsford House as part of Biodiversity Week. We will split into teams with Borders Forest Trust, Woodland Trust and Forestry Commission and record all the big old veteran and ancient trees for the national ancient tree hunt database to boost the number of tree records currently held for the Borders. No special knowledge is needed, all that is required is a love of fine trees and a lot of enthusiasm.

The big tree hunt in the Borders has gathered pace and many new discoveries have been made. There are plenty of fabulous trees that are yet to be discovered and recorded onto the Woodland Trust database. Wonderful, knotty and gnarled parkland and country estate trees are probably the best ones to get started with.

Visit www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk to find out more or email diane@bordersforesttrust.org. Also look out for the Borders Heritage Tree Trail Leaflet, mapping our ancient trees across the Borders and coming soon.

Diane Bennett

Forest School Teacher Training Project



Forest School teacher training in progress

After much anticipation . . . finally, the Forest School Leaders course has started.

Arrangements were finalised. Bowhill was the venue. Scottish Borders Council (SBC) Education Department offered invaluable assistance and support. Teachers signed up (I now have a waiting list for a potential future course!) And then, in November last year, fourteen teachers from a variety of primary and secondary schools from across the region and Sara Best, an independent environmental/ arts educationalist (Play Works Best), attended the first component of the course (five days of intensive training).

The first day brought a very welcome VIP visit by Councillor Catriona Bhatia. She joined the group in their initial ice breaker session, where they practised tying some knots, participated in an outdoor group activity and enjoyed the official photo shoot. Councillor Bhatia went on to share some very supportive kind words about the project; the work of Borders Forest Trust; the hopeful future for environmental education in the Borders and praise for the teacher participants.

The Trust has set up the Forest School Teacher Training Project to develop the environmental education capacity,

skills and confidence of local teachers, creating a sustainable future for outdoor learning through a series of training programmes. We are very grateful to our funders for making this project possible – thanks to the Forestry for People Challenge Fund, the Ernest Cook Trust, the R S Hayward Trust and the Roger Vere Foundation.

Over the coming months, the trainees will attend further taught components of the course; specifically three days of practical training and a two day Outdoor First Aid course. The trainees will work independently on a large amount of written coursework, collating a policy/ procedure Handbook and developing/ delivering a six week Forest School project with a group of pupils. It is a significant amount of work, given the work involved in being a teacher alone. My hat goes off to them! My job will focus on supporting them through this process and helping to make it as painless as possible. This will involve assistance with coursework and handbook queries, establishing suitable sites for them to use, sourcing funding for resources and kit and helping in the delivery of their six week projects. I'm going to have to get good at juggling!

There is also an Introduction to Forest School training course taking place in May. This will provide trainees with the

opportunity to gain an Open College Network Level 1 qualification, learn about the benefits of Forest School/ outdoor learning and equip them with ideas of outdoor activities to aid personal development etc. This course does not qualify participants to deliver Forest School projects themselves. However, I intend to offer a series of follow up Continued Professional Development (CPD) sessions for teachers, e.g. risk assessing outdoor spaces/ woodlands and highlighting the links between outdoor activities and a Curriculum for Excellence. I hope that this will encourage more teachers to take all aspects of their teaching outdoors, in turn providing opportunities for many more children to benefit from a wide range of outdoor learning experiences.

I would like to take this opportunity to offer a huge thanks to Katharine Cotter (SBC Schools Environmental Co-ordinator). Her continued help and support with all aspects of this training programme has been absolutely fantastic. Thank you so much, I really appreciate it. I'd also like to 'big up' all of the Forest School Leader trainees. You're a great team and you will all get through this!

Anna Craigen

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Those who endure conker

For three years now I have helped judge the Scottish Conker Championships, which are held in Peebles every October. Since the first competition in 2007, this has become a much anticipated fixture in the Peebles and BFT calendar. Each year we have seen more entrants with over 70 competitors converging on Peebles last autumn including the 2007 World Conker Champion.

Officiating at the event is not for the faint-hearted, not least because of the competitive nature of some of the entrants. Over three years I have had decisions referred to the chief judge, been given a dressing down for mis-spelt names in local newspapers, and for presiding over a muddy tent.

A constant worry is the threat of injury to competitors, even though the Health & Safety Executive are clear that the risk from playing conkers is incredibly low and just not worth bothering about. Nonetheless we are obliged to provide safety goggles if people wish to wear them, though interestingly very few people do apart from film crews!

There are four categories in the competition; Juniors, Youths, Adults and Rogues. Conkers are provided for the main categories but the rogue competition sees people using their own doctored specimens. Understandably people are reluctant to divulge their secrets, but vinegar and slow drying often feature. Thankfully I have not yet had to disqualify a cunningly disguised stone or piece of wood.

The event is part of the Tweed Valley Forest Festival meaning that there are plenty of other attractions to visit if an early exit from the competition is your lot. Fortunately most of the other events are indoors as conkering usually coincides with rain and gales.

NB. Why horse chestnut? In its native Turkey it is given to horses for food and medicine. More recently it has been found that a chemical, aescin, extracted from conkers is a powerful remedy for sprains and bruising, which are of course a side-effect of badly aimed conkers!

Reuben Singleton



2009's Scottish Conker Champions (L-R): Junior Champion: Christopher McDonald; Youth Champion: Scott Bell; Adult Champion: Maurice Hurrell; Rogue Champion: Lynsey Menmuir

Winter Quiet Times

The particularly wintry months we've experienced this year have seen a wee slow down in outings to the woods with schools and groups. This hasn't been a bad thing, as it's provided me with plenty of time to: delve into the world of grant applications to ensure the continuation of my post past March; support the Forest School trainee teachers, and then, when school activities have been possible - I've really, really enjoyed being out and about.

A particularly good day was spent with a well wrapped up P1 class from Langlee Primary who joined me at Wooplaw in January to learn about trees and animals in Winter and to follow animal tracks and signs in the snow as part of their Cold Weather project. We found deer, dog,

hare, rabbit, fox and bird footprints, chewed cones and owl pellets (which I pulled apart for them) – the kids were in their element. I think I must have covered an extra couple of miles of ground, dashing from one newly discovered dog footprint to another!

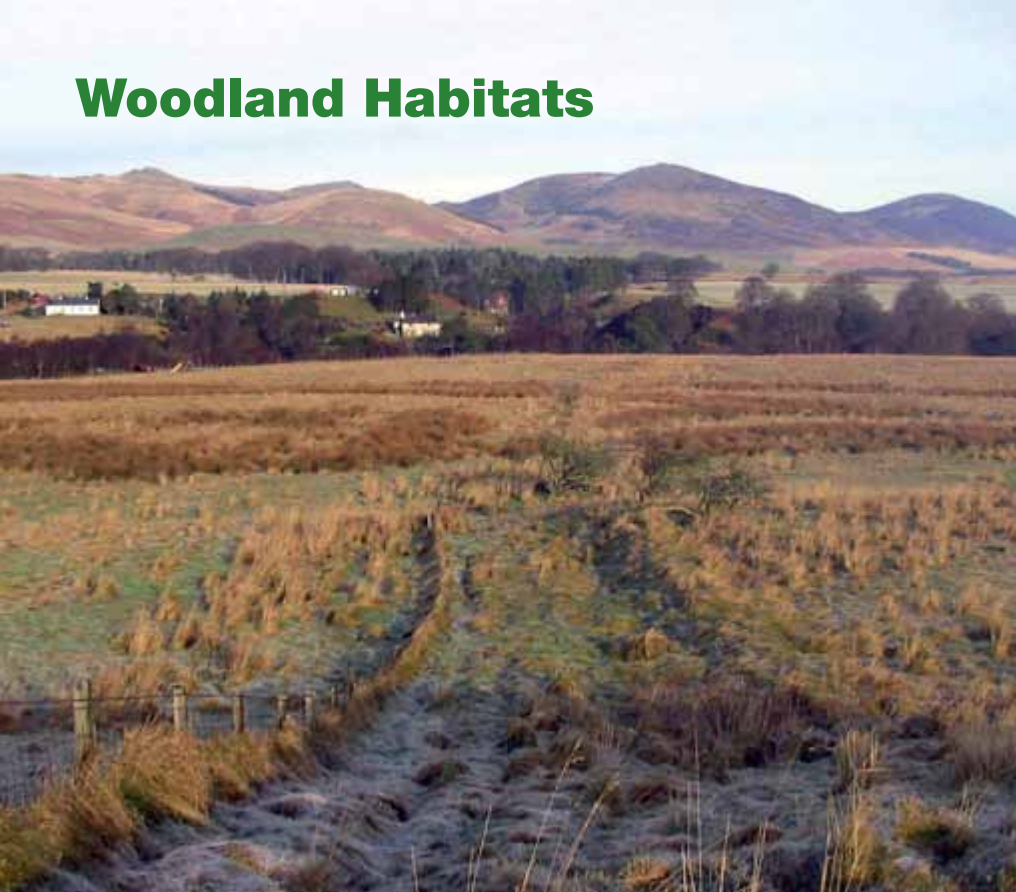
Over the coming months I'm looking forward to a number of new Forest School projects starting. These will involve working with a range of age groups from nursery to secondary level and will be located in some new woodland venues, e.g. Coldingham Nursery in an area of woodland adjacent to their school and Coldstream Primary in a woodland still to be identified, possibly the Hirsell (any suggestions are very welcome!?).

In my mission to get more folks (particularly families) out and about and enjoying/ using our local woodlands, I intend to hold a variety of different woodland events again this year. In addition to these, I hope to organise a series of informal evening workshops for parents, grandparents, childminders and so on to provide ideas for free, healthy, fun activities for the whole family to enjoy. These are likely to take place in the lead up to school holidays.

For further information on all events please check out the BFT website.

Anna Craigen

Woodland Habitats



The Steele

The last couple of months have been dominated by two things; preparing applications for the less than straightforward Scottish Rural Development Programme grant scheme and the weather. You can do something about the former, usually involving tranquilisers and hours of eye watering time in front of a computer screen, but nothing about the weather. The knock on effects of frost, ice and snow are that little in the way of practical site works such as fencing, planting and weeding has been done in December and January. George Moffat and his volunteers have strived manfully to weed and maintain trees and Scott Speed has been working hard to reduce the threat of Roe deer damage at sites such as Craigdilly (next to the Megget Water) and at Broadgairhill.

An application for some 200 hectares of new native woodland planting has been submitted for Broadgairhill Farm, situated in the top western end of the Ettrick Valley. This farm was recently bought by James Oliver, a far sighted telecommunications entrepreneur (and not the celebrity TV chef), who owns the neighbouring farm of Overkirkhope, where the Trust is working on behalf of James to plant 170 hectares of new native woodland over 2010 and 2011. These two areas of planting will result in an impressive 370 odd hectares of new native woodland, situated less than 2 kilometres (as the raven flies) from

Carrifran glen, thereby giving the Trust's Ettrick Forest vision a great lift.

Another exciting new native woodland site has been given SRDP grant approval, at the Steel in Nine Mile Burn just off the A702 in the shade of the Pentland Hills. The land to be planted is an old improved field of some 14 hectares which is perfect for establishing one of our more rarified woodland types: an upland ash woodland. The land is owned by the Zeally family, who are keen to create a sylvan backdrop to their cottage.

One of the most exciting developments in our woodland habitats project is the recruitment of a new Site Manager and we have been fortunate to lure a forester called Barry Roberts from the Mersey Forest. Barry is a graduate of Bangor University who has experience in native woodland establishment, Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping and using the National Vegetation Classification system. So many systems, but Barry will boost our ability to produce nice maps and to match tree species to site conditions.

Two sites up at St Mary's Loch have been given approval for grant funding through the SRDP. Dryhope and Kirkstead Farms (part of Philiphaugh Estates) are hot spots for the Black Grouse and we are due to start practical works shortly with our partners; the Royal Society for



Borders Organic Gardeners is an association of gardeners throughout the Scottish Borders and North Northumberland who are keen to use and support organic methods. We run a number of public events throughout the region, including Potato Day and Apple Day.

In addition, members have a regular newsletter, workshops, garden visits, talks and social events. For just £5 a year, per household, you can get access to information, support, advice and the chance to exchange plants, seeds, ideas and experiences with other friendly and enthusiastic gardeners.

So, if you would like to grow food free of insecticides etc., garden in harmony with nature or know more about organic gardening, why not get in contact?

For more information, visit our website:
www.bordersorganicgardeners.org.uk
or call 01750 76259.

the Protection of Birds, Southern Upland Partnership and Tweed Forum.

Finally, we must acknowledge the contribution of our Chairman John Hunt in assisting with site visits and mapping and to the hard work and dedication of our Projects Manager Nicola Hunt who has shouldered the Site Managers work since the departure of Hugh Chalmers over a year ago. Nicola has worked through the early stages of pregnancy and in spite of morning sickness and feeling less than a 100%, has kept the Trust's native woodland programme on the rails.

Willie McGhee



Broadgairhill



Real Wood Studios at the Scottish Parliament

Real Wood Studios

One year on from our launch and Real Wood Studios is moving in high places. December saw a visit from Environment Minister, Roseanna Cunningham, who toured the workshop, learning more about the bespoke, hand-crafted furniture and wood works that are produced here, before taking a tour of the new showroom, where a welly boot holder caught her eye. The Minister seemed impressed by what she saw, saying "The recently named Real Wood Studios is certainly demonstrating how native hardwoods can be transformed into beautiful bespoke furniture of the highest quality. I wish this venture every success and I'm delighted that sustainability is at the heart of this enterprise."

Just a month later, we received an invitation from Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) to exhibit our work at the Scottish Parliament. On January 13th, we made the trip to Holyrood as part of FCS's Role of Forestry in Climate Change Mitigation reception for MSPs. The event had been arranged to highlight the benefits offered by trees and woodland,

and a part of this was to flag up the green credentials of timber as a building material. The twists and turns of the parliament building meant that it wasn't the easiest job in the world transporting all our furniture from the goods entrance to the reception area, but we were really pleased by the feedback we got from MSPs, Councillors and other guests. Many thanks to FCS for inviting us to take part.

As 2010 gets underway we've got lots of exciting developments in the pipeline for both the furniture-making and timber processing parts of the business. Commissions continue to come in for a wide range of pieces – everything from tailor-made kitchens to one-off jewellery boxes. We've got lots more work to do to build the business and we want to make as many people as possible aware of the potential of locally-sourced native hardwoods. Please drop by to see how we're getting on or visit our website, www.realwoodstudios.com

Graham Murdoch

Tool Talk: Planting Trees

I have often been asked "should I bring my spade tomorrow?" or people will say "I have my spade in the boot of the car." Nice forward thinking people, but in reality the garden spade on an upland hill is like using a plough in a window box. This is because the ground conditions are so varied from metre to metre you have to have a light versatile tool, which can be carried uphill and work between the scree and underlying stone.

The planting spear for me is the ideal tool. It is light, strong and can get to those places where the big heid cannae. The spear also gives you the correct depth and thickness of hole in which to plant your cell grown tree thanks to the length and diameter of the spear head. It does however make screening (clearing of vegetation) more difficult, but this can be overcome by pre-spraying the vegetation with herbicide prior to planting.

Rabbit spades and mattocks have their part to play depending on the depth of soil and vegetation, but if we consider the conditions BFT finds on the hill, I would always go for the spear if given a choice.

George Moffat

Tim Holden Establishment Contractor

🌿 Woodland and hedge planting

🌿 Herbicide spraying

🌿 Chainsaw and hedge cutting work

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Working with Estates



Plane over St Mary's Loch

The Trust has long recognised that in order to fulfil our vision of creating significant swathes of native woodland across south Scotland, we needed to work with all landowners. Since 1998 we have enjoyed a close working relationship with one of the largest landowners in the western Borders, Wemyss and March Estates. The Estate shares many of the Trust's aspirations and has been instrumental in assisting the Trust in creating a mosaic of native woodlands in the Ettrick Forest target area.

The genesis for this partnership arose, in large measure, through the vision and enthusiasm of Elizabeth Benson, chatelaine of the Barns Estate, who has supported the development of native woodland restoration projects in the Borders and who has been using hardwood and softwood timber sourced from the Wemyss and March Estate for Estate building projects, such as the restoration of Barns Tower, near Peebles http://www.periodproperty.co.uk/ppuk_discovering_ppom_200804.shtml.

Elizabeth has also worked closely with Woodschool (now Real Wood Studios) in timber processing and timber kilning.

Support by Wemyss and March for the expansion of native woodlands started in the 1970s, at the instigation of Chris Badenoch, late of the then Nature Conservancy Council, when the Estate fenced off the Craigdilly Site of Special Scientific interest at the head of Megget reservoir. This is one of the most remote and highest native woodlands in the Borders and over the last 30 odd years it has undergone a slow recovery and

expansion, now being almost completely composed of Rowan trees.

In the late 1990's the current W&M Estate Factor, Martin Andrews suggested regenerating and planting native woodlands on Estate land at the top end of the Yarrow Valley on Riskinhope Farm, and up the cleuchs on the northern side of the Megget reservoir, on Craigierig and Megget Head farms. The resulting programme of fencing, regeneration works and planting conserved the SSSI remnant woodlands at Herman Law and Muchra and provided the potential for expanding native woodland at Linghope and Glengaber. These woodlands are still 'in the making' so to speak, with constant pressure from blue hares and Roe deer, and so require ongoing care and attention. The Trust also works with Jim Mitchell, a tenant of Wemyss and March Estates, who farms at Henderland Farm, where the Trust has fenced off another high altitude SSSI to conserve, regenerate and expand the Henderland Bank hazel woodland.

The largest and most exciting project with Wemyss and March to date has been the establishment of a new native woodland along the southern shores of Megget reservoir adjoining the existing Craigdilly SSSI woodland. This partnership is currently pondering the potential for further expanding native woodland in the western Borders and we look forward to many more years of integrating the work and land management visions of a large commercial estate and a regional, community based, environmental NGO.

Willie McGhee



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