

FCRA News

The newsletter about retired Forestry Commission employees

Issue 12 March 2001

GLENTRESS RE-VISITED

John Keenleyside returns to his roots!
He was there from 1951 to 1953 at Forestry Training School.

I re-visited Glentress in the summer of 1999. I was not surprised that all but one of the tin huts had gone. They were built in the 1920s. The forest had been planted wall to wall with conifers. What did I find now? There is a fine road right up the glen and down the other side, now used as a forest drive. The trees have been thinned and broadleaved trees planted, a water feature has been created and picnic tables provided. Large Douglas fir trees remain as a tribute to David Douglas, the botanist who introduced them to this country. The leaves of broadleaved trees fluttered in the breeze in what was once an exposed glen with poor soils and inadequate drainage. The first broadleaved trees were planted by the forestry students according to plans prepared by Prof M L Anderson of Edinburgh University who had the foresight so long ago to restructure the forest.

We left forestry school in the summer of 1953 soon after the Queen's coronation and remember seeing the ceremony on a black and white television at Glentress. We had a visit by the Queen of Tonga en route to London for the coronation. Much work was done in preparing the school grounds for her visit. On the way down from the forest I spotted one or two boulders at the roadside which we whitewashed in army fashion for the visit. I did not see any of the lumps of coal which were also whitewashed at the edge of the bunker at the cook house!

At the end of our session we were presented

with our awards by Forestry Commissioner, Sir John Stirling of Fairburn, Muir of Ord. The school then closed and moved to better accommodation at Faskally House, Pitlochry which had been a Hydro Electric Board training establishment and had all mod cons. A change from Glentress which had icicles hanging from the showerheads on frosty mornings.

I was pleased to see the new hostelry at the side of the main road entrance. I went in and enjoyed a lovely meal looking out on the lands of Horsburgh and over the River Tweed to Cardrona Forest where students planted many trees over the years. I sat there and enjoyed the view and the food, reminisced on how many things had changed for the better. No food rationing, no bumping up the glen in a clapped out ex-army vehicle with poor springs, no slaving in the forest with a seven pound axe and five foot crosscut saw to cut down a few trees per day.

The students from Glentress, around 30 per year from 1946 to 1953, mainly went on to work for the Forestry Commission. Others went to the private sector at home and abroad in Africa, the Colonies, America and all over the world.

My visit brought back so many memories. I was delighted to see so many changes, for the better, and thoroughly enjoyed re-visiting after many years. I can recommend to any forester passing down the Tweed Valley a trip around Glentress forest drive with a picnic or a meal in the hostelry at the road end with excellent food and views.

CIVILS SPOT

In the December issue of FCRA NEWS I mentioned the Forestry Civil Engineering Newsletter (contact Diana Hilliard, tel: 01721 720 448 for more information). I have just received the latest issue and there are two items of interest to retired civil engineering staff. The first is Bailey Bridges. The FC still owns and operates about 50 of the original World War II design. They were planned as temporary structures and after 50 years of use have developed fatigue cracks which are difficult to detect, and can lead to structural failure. The then Chief Engineer in 1966, E H MacMilan, pointed out these dangers. The FC now considers that "these bridges are temporary and should not be used for forestry extraction". If you have one in your vicinity, take a walk on it "while stocks last". They are part of the FC's heritage structures. I suggest we start a conservation society where Bailey Bridge "anoraks" can meet to discuss issues of the moment.

The second item is tram rail bridges. These are the stuff of civil engineering legend. Most forests have them. They must have been easy and quick to construct. They were built in the 1950s when an enterprising member of FC bought up used tram rails from Liverpool. The rails were laid side by side, concrete was poured in the spaces and over the top to form a slab deck. Soon after installation, a consulting engineer was asked to give an opinion, especially when the odd rails had broken due to work hardening and brittle failure. Spans were limited to 5.2 metres, but load tests were never done. That was over 40 years ago and the rails were 50 years old at the time! In view of recent Railtrack problems with fracturing rails, the FC has arranged for structural assessments, as many carry regular timber loads. Perhaps they also are destined to become FC heritage structures where "anoraks" meet!

I am sure retired civils must have interesting yarns of constructing both type of bridges - how about it?

WARTIME STORIES

John Jackson was forester in charge of Glenbranter Forest near Dunoon from 1940-46. He then took over Benmore Forest until 1970 from where he retired to Dunoon. He has sent in a wartime story which has a similar fishing theme to that of Bill Sutherland's in the last issue. You will recall that they worked with each other from 1957 to 1966.

"I had succeeded Jimmy MacDonald who had taken charge of a Timber Control Unit at Benmore. He stayed on in his house while I moved into a vacant FC holding house. Under the stringent rationing period fresh meat was at a minimum but coming from the Border Region I knew a thing or two of how to take sea trout and salmon (illegally) during their spawning in fresh rivers and streams. I arranged a meeting between Jimmy, who was a keen angler, and my colleague Andrew Stuart, who knew nothing about poaching and was in charge of Island Forest. I realised the first run of sea trout for the season had begun and decided to take action. When I informed my two colleagues of my intentions they enthusiastically wished to be included.

An ideal pool was chosen in the River Cur which passed close to my house. This was about 15 yards long and divided by a narrow island down the middle.

We arrived at the pool in total darkness at 7 o'clock armed with torchlights and carrying bags. I was the only one possessing the necessary equipment (cleek). We decided upon a total of 9 fish - 3 each. As there were plenty of fish splashing around after we had caught the desired total of 9 and after further consultation we decided to take one more each. They could always be salted away to be used until next run of fish. I had succeeded in taking two more when Andrew and I realised Jimmy was missing. There were vigorous splashing noises but no vocal sounds as we had insisted on absolute silence during the operation. I rushed over to the other side of the island and was just in time to rescue Jimmy from the river. He was passing by, floating on his back, empty fishing hand-net pointing to the sky, not a sound coming from his mouth. With water pouring from his soaked clothing, after his rescue, he insisted we should take the final third fish to complete our objective. This done, we returned to my house to share out equally the spoils of our night's efforts. There were numerous other such exploits carried out successfully in that long pool on the River Cur following that memorable one, where one of our party almost became a victim of Loch Eck! In conclusion I am sure John Younger, previous owner of Benmore Estate, retained the salmon and sea trout fishing rights through the River Echaig and Loch Eck. Although taken illegally, these fish helped at least 3 families in Cowal to survive hardships of the war years.

John Lawrang FCE 01903 724117

WHO AND WHERE ARE THEY NOW



This photo has been sent in by Mary Scott of Alford. It was taken in the Glentress FTS lecture room in the period 1946-9. The students look more like POWs! The man sitting second from the right is Malcolm Scott, Mary's late husband. The man standing at the end of the table is the late Tom Robbie, who was in charge of Glentress at the time. Can readers identify any of the others?

NEWS OF THE FCRA NORTHERN GROUP

From John Keenleyside

Forty-nine members met on 12 December at the Lochardil Hotel in Inverness for Christmas lunch, representing all former grades of staff in the FC. The prize for the person travelling furthest went to Ted Saunders from Shetland, previously it had gone to our loyal supporter Frank Sutherland from John o' Groats. We did not think he could be beaten but was on this occasion by Ted. Thanks for coming Ted.

The guest speaker was Roddie Ross from Cawdor who originated from Dornoch, before it was famous for the Madonna wedding. Roddie started at Dornoch Nursery under Jimmy Grubb. Later he trained at Faskally and ended up at Cawdor estate which has many fine trees and extensive blocks of forest. Now supposed to be retired he does consultancy work on his own account.

His after dinner speech was amusing, informative, entertaining and enjoyed by all who attended. Unfortunately he did not bring his bagpipes with him or launch into a Gaelic song, both are spheres in which he is an accomplished musician and former Mod Gold medalist.

GO TO AMSTERDAM

Are you feeling fed up with the cold, dull, damp days and nights in Britain? I can recommend a short trip to Amsterdam to invigorate your life, especially as Spring is arriving. There are many cheap flights from England and Scotland. You land at Schiphol, it's a 15 minute train ride to Centraal Station, buy a "stripcard" for the city public transport system, jump on a tram and you can be in an inexpensive hospitable central hotel within another 10 minutes. The stay can be budget or over-the-top depending on your tastes. The "Lonely Planet" guide is the most helpful for a range of entertainments, the cheapest is aimlessly wandering in the canal belt and people watching, especially in Leidseplein. Also very worthwhile are a canal trip, visits to brown cafes (particularly if it is raining), Albert Cuyp market, free ferries on the IJ, Amstelkring Museum, Tropen Museum, coffee in the Central Station buffet then joining the hubbub in the surrounding area, coffee on the top floor of Metz & Co department store, and a ride on circle tram No 20, which passes all the major tourist sites and is good for orientation.

Go on - do it now - and I won't ask you to write about your holiday. Just enjoy it!

TREE TEST

I saw a short report in a pre-Christmas newspaper. Germany's ambassador to Macedonia was caught felling a tree of a protected species for his Christmas decoration. It sparked an official complaint, but he enjoyed diplomatic immunity. The tree? Molika fir, which was cut in Pelister National Park 190km from Skopje. I can't identify this. Any ideas? Does anyone have information about this tree including its botanical name? Is there a good story here?

THE TRACTOR REMEMBERED

Readers will recall in the September issue of FCRA NEWS that Graham Black purchased an ex-FC Roadless Fordson Super Major tractor 701 FUW and was keen to trace its FC history. The article was successful in generating interest. I received the following letter from him.

"I was very pleased with the responses I received to the article in your last newsletter, the results of which far exceeding expectations.

First, Douglas Petty from York telephoned to say he had a couple of photos of the tractor taken in the Downs around June 1964. I now have really good copies of these and have subsequently discovered they were taken at Slindon near Arundel. The tractor is being used to demonstrate a Ransome Slasher TG3007 and a Wilder Rainthorpe Heavy Duty Scrubmaster.

Through a series of other contracts (Eugene Budgen, Richard Spencer, Ron Kerdier, Albert Cox) I eventually spoke to Peter Windiate who drove the tractor for a couple of years from new. He confirmed it was delivered to Bramshill Forest and used for extracting timber with a couple of 6 ton trailers.

I would be very pleased to hear from anyone else who has memories or information. My telephone number is 01223 263024."

GRAHAM JEFFREY MEMORIAL PRIZE - AND CASHEL FOREST

Readers will recall Graham Jeffrey's obituary in FCRA NEWS this time last year. This year his widow, Sylvia, instigated the Graham Jeffrey Memorial Prize. This is awarded to a pupil carrying out a forest related project, or essay, from participating primary schools using Cashel Forest on Lochlomondside as an educational resource. This year's winner comes from Drymen Primary School. The positive response from local schools in the first year of the award is very encouraging.

Cashel Forest was also in the news this year for its very successful open day. Over 400 visitors enjoyed the exhibits, including clay modelling, oatcake baking, bird box making, trampolining and face painting. Many rambled over the hill among the dedication trees. Robert Coia, the woodcarver, had a display. His sculpture of a hand holding an acorn is on show at the RBG Edinburgh, and will be coming to Cashel in March. During the year there were a wide range of other activities and the ideas for this year include waymarking, dyke building, tree trails and wild flowers. Volunteers, guides, helpers and practical people are ALWAYS NEEDED! Please come along, join in, or help out.

Contact John Sinclair, Cashel Forest Office, Balmana G63 0AW, tel: 01360 870 450, e-mail: cashel@btinternet.com

SCOTTISH PLANT COLLECTORS' GARDEN

Scotland's newest garden at Pitlochry is well on the way to completion, with a proposed opening in summer 2002. It will celebrate 300 years of botanical exploration and is an important facet of Scottish heritage. No other nationality has produced so many pioneer plant collectors and botanists. Situated in the heart of Scotland's "Big Tree" countryside, the garden will pay tribute to the Scottish heroes of the botanical world.

There is not a garden in Europe which does not contain plants derived from collections made by early Scottish plant collectors, and the European landscape has been transformed by forest tree species introduced from the Americas.

The garden is part of the Pitlochry Festival Theatre. One of its focal points will be an amphitheatre overlooking the Tummel, for outdoor performances. It is proposed to have events based on the lives, lores and legends of the plant collectors. The garden will guide visitors through the incredible journeys of plant exploration. There will be horticultural tours connecting with a network of associated gardens.

There is still much to be done before the opening. If you would like to be involved in any way, particularly voluntary assistance, you should contact The Scottish Plant Collectors' Garden, Pitlochry Festival Theatre, Pitlochry PH16 5DR, tel: 01796 484600.

There will be a number of guided tours in 2001 before the opening in 2002. They will be on 12th, 13th, 14th, 15th May, 28th, 29th, 30th, 31st July, 29th, 30th September, 1st, 2nd October.

Booking is essential. For further information contact the Box Office, tel: 01796 484626, website: www.scottishplantcollectorsgarden.com

Life in retirement

I had often wondered what rangers get up to in retirement. In their working lives they were both individualistic and opportunistic! They were ideas people who occupied specialist niches in the corporate body. Their views often became mainstream activities in the FC's conservation and recreation functions. So I had to think of rangers I knew who had recently retired. "Brad" Bradbury came to mind first. Here is his story.

"I joined the Forestry Commission in 1972 after almost 20 years in the Royal Navy and worked as a ranger under chief forester Bernard Beard at Christmas Common. Some would say it was unusual that after a career at sea I should become a ranger but I had always, from a small boy, wanted to go to sea and to work with wildlife so I had both! I stayed at Christmas Common until 1977 when I moved to Wendover to carry on with wildlife work but also to deal with recreation which was beginning to go beyond the quiet walk and relaxation stage.

Ken Trodd became the boss when Bernard retired and in 1987 Ken encouraged me to apply for a head ranger post in West England Conservancy and I was fortunate to get the post. In the new job I worked to Martin Orrom and later Rod Leslie in the Bristol Conservancy office but lived in the Forest of Dean. The job was in two parts. The first was liaising with chief foresters in part of the Conservancy with regard to wildlife and conservation. The second was the training of rangers which took place at Cannock Chase.

In 1993 things changed. I was posted to Thetford Forest as chief ranger to replace Rex Whitta who had retired. In the Autumn of 1996 I suffered a heart attack at work and after returning life seemed to get more and more stressful, so I retired in December 1997. Having retired I made a beeline for real Scotland (north of Pitlochry) and spent a month with my daughter in Burghead, but I did not take part in the annual Boxing Day swim in the harbour!

My wife Pauline has a brother in New Zealand and this prompted us into a 6 week tour of both north and south island of New Zealand. This was a great experience and we saw plenty of wildlife as well as the outstanding scenery. Amongst the wildlife were red, fallow and wapiti deer, Himalayan thar, albatros, penguins, bell birds, falcon, wild turkeys, keas and many others - we even saw the elusive kiwi but that was in captivity. For anglers the trout fishing was out of this world and for foresters the kauri pines have to be seen to be believed.

I suppose the most enduring memory of New Zealand is the complete failure of electricity in Auckland city which lasted for several weeks. Ships were brought in to the harbour to generate power and large generators were along all the roads with cables running everywhere like crazy knitting.

The other outstanding memories are of the Te Papa Museum in Wellington, newly opened when we visited, and the overwhelming kindness of all the New Zealand people we met.

I am still involved with game and deer shooting and act as trainer assessor and internal verifier for the Deer Management Qualifications operated by the British Association for Shooting and Conservation and British Deer Society. I also run deer management courses for the agricultural college near Ipswich. House decorating, gardening and a pond with about 60 fish take up some time, while riding my 24 year old Honda CB400 motorcycle in fine weather uses up more time. Also our local FC retirement group organises some excellent outings and get-togethers. So retirement is not the end of life but rather the start of a new and exciting phase where I (or maybe my wife) am boss!

Brad has also put me in touch with another retired ranger colleague. More of that next time.

OBITUARIES

Bill Sutherland has drawn together stories from many sources on BILL JOHNSON who died recently. He was born in 1915 and during the War was a fighter pilot in North Africa. After being shot down over Libya he was imprisoned. At the end of the War, Bill married Rita in 1946 and went to live and work on Poltalloch Estate, Lochgilhead until he joined the FC as District Land Agent working from Cairnbaan.

In 1960 he became Conservancy Land Agent in Dumfries and after 6 years took on the same position in Glasgow.

Richard Illingworth takes up the story. He worked under Bill when he first joined the FC and later as DEO Aberfoyle. Richard writes, "Bill was a Scot through and through. He always wore the kilt, sang on occasions and had the Gaelic. He was a much-liked person and an excellent boss. He looked after the many Swedish/Finnish wooden houses built by the FC and he designed and built "British Timber Houses". Richard concludes, "He had an engaging personality and a good sense of humour. He was a kind man and I will remember him with affection". And so say all of us.

Peter Innes, now retired in Forres, tells us that Bill was a talented football player but he says, "The thing I remember most about Bill was his pleasant manner and his unfailing boyish grin which never left him".

Rosalind relates how her dad took out a boat on Poltalloch Estate. He couldn't understand why the laird was running along the bank, shouting. After swimming ashore he learned that the laird was telling him there was no bung in the boat.

She writes, "He disliked litter louts and caravans, meanness and unpleasant people and male chauvinists".

Rita died suddenly while with Bill on holiday in Spain. He later remarried a long-standing friend of both Rita and himself and the couple went to live in Chelmsford where he died.

Anne Stohlnr tells of **STELLA SIMPSON's** death on 18 November at home, after a brave fight against ovarian cancer.

"Stella moved from London to Edinburgh on her marriage. As her 3 children were growing up she began work with the Commission as a typist (originally at Drumsheugh) and then transferred to Corstorphine Road, where she was promoted to PS to the Controller of Finance (Colin Turquand).

In 1986 she moved to Private Forestry and Services Division (Alastair Rowan) and stayed there for 9 years working for Donald Thompson, Alistair Scott, Graham Gill and Bob Selmes. During that time the Division's remit changed several times as well as its Head - only Stella remained the same! She also helped to look after several Chairmen (Sir David Montgomery, Raymond Johnstone, Sir Peter Hutchison and DGs (George Holmes, Gwyn Francis, Robin Cutler and David Bills). She worked part-time for David Grundy for the 18 months before her retirement in 1997 aged 65.

Stella had tremendous enthusiasm for every aspect of life - including her work - and was unremittingly positive and cheerful. She was well read and up to the minute on every sort of news - she read the Financial Times every day; she loved to travel - in fact she even visited America and Paris during her illness; she also loved her garden and listening to music. And, of course, she had great pride and pleasure in the company and achievements of her 3 grandchildren.

Obituaries for **ATHOLE WHAYMAN** and **ARTHUR CADMAN** will appear in the next issue.

FROM THE EDITOR

I am sure you have heard the editor's lament before, it seems common to smaller organisations which struggle to produce newsletters. Where are the next contributions? Who is going to write them? Not the editor - again! What do you think? There he goes; banging on the same old drum! I would welcome more contributions, it's a way of keeping in touch with friends and colleagues. How about a few sparkling memories. Did we really do it that way 30 years ago! And in retirement many of you have chosen unusual activities and pastimes - we should like to know about it. There must be somebody who has walked from Lands End to John o' Groats via the 3 peaks while pushing a shopping trolley. Let's hear about it!

WANT TO CANCEL SLASHER AND FCRA NEWS?

* There may be circumstances when you wish to cancel Slasher and FCRA NEWS. This is straightforward. Lynne Dennison at FC HQ Corstorphine is responsible for the address database. Give her a call on 0131 314 6550 (direct line) or use the FC HQ No 0131 334 0303 and ask for her.

FORESTER TRAINING SCHOOLS HISTORY

Progress with obtaining information on the FTS has been very satisfactory reports Henry Smith. He will be meeting Geoff Waygood at Parkend in the early spring. Geoff was a student and later an instructor at the Dean, and is concentrating on its history. They are jointly working on the draft of the publication and hope to proceed with printing this year.

They still need photographs of the schools, except the Dean, of which they have many. They do have a very small selection of photographs of Faskally,

Benmore and Lynford Hall, but would like more from which to make a selection. Their only disappointment has been the lack of information from Gwydr. There have been few responses and even fewer facts and photographs.

They are still appealing for help at this late stage, new information can be incorporated. Why the dearth of contact from ex-Welsh students? I should have thought they would have been keen to ensure the only Welsh school had a prominent and fitting role in the proposed publication.

FCRA AGM 2001

This year's AGM will be held in the Lake District. We have booked the Damson Dene Hotel at Boness on Windermere, which offers swimming, squash, sauna and a gym (for more information try www.damsondene.co.uk). Graham Prest will host a tour of Grizedale, well known for recreation, wildlife conservation, woodland sculptures and cycling. What more could you want for a short, or extended break. Keep May 8th and 9th free for this exciting event. Come along and renew friendships! There are quite a few retirees in the Lakes, this is a great opportunity to get together and form a new Group. Why not? And a special for anoraks - steam boats and trains at Windermere and Ravenglass!

HAVE YOU REALLY BEEN THERE?

In the 10th issue of FCRA NEWS I asked for stories of visits to unusual places. I had only one response. Charles Cooke has been to the Karakoram - more later. I cannot believe that somebody has not been to one of the other places mentioned. To remind you they were Caucasuses and Caspian Sea, Taiwan, Ethiopia, Hudson Bay. My

latest list of unconventional places is Tien Shan and Takla Makan, Alaska, Laos, Suriname, Madegascar.

This sparkling spot is open to anybody in the FC whether employed or retired. I shall be disappointed if I have no response, and I shall be forced to give you my own account of high altitude treks in Milton Keynes!

SPOTLIGHT ON THE DEAN

The Forest of Dean is a location which has produced many forestry characters, and it has also proved a popular place in retirement. Similar to the great resting places of the old elephants in the herd - or something like that!

I am hoping we can have a regular contribution to "Life in Retirement". Bart Venner has already written something which will appear in the next issue. He has agreed to encourage other Dean retirees to contribute. Please help him - and me - by writing up your interesting retirement activities. More next time.

FAREWELL

		Retired	Age			Retired	Age
Sidney Beer	Bodmin	1970	90	David Mackintosh	Fort Augustus	1994	68
Philip Davies	Rhyl	1972	88	John McMillan	Campbeltown	1981	79
Doris Dodge	Dolgellau	1987	73	George Milne	Fochabers	1994	71
William Evans	Colwyn Bay	1978	85	Oliver Powell	Northallerton	1993	71
John Hay	Longtown	1989	75	David Williams	Llandovery	1971	94
Joseph Hendrie	East Harling	1980	80	John Windsor	Dumfries	1980	67
George King	Blaenau			Peter Buss	Ringwood	1989	71
	Ffestiniog	1983	78	Arthur Cadman	Bournemouth	1968	89
John Knight	Cambridge	2000	60	James Dignan	Dumfries	1985	76
Alois Knoll	Kelty	1988	76	Hugh Graham	Lochgilthead	1972	85
Trevor Lewis	Coleford	1990	69	Nathan Haugh	Newton Stewart	1985	75
Roderick Mackinnon	Glenurquhart	1981	83				

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Check with contacts for exact area covered.

WELCOME TO RETIREMENT

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Bill Cameron	Inverness
Alex Herd	Dunning
Mary Murdoch	Stranraer
Lachlan McDowall	Aros, Mull
Phil Atherton	Edinburgh

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