

FCRA News

The newsletter about retired Forestry Commission employees

Issue 16 - March 2002

Forester turns Farmer

By Martin Fletcher, New Forest District

In July my wife and I went to stay with Tony and Mary Joslin on their 1,000 acres of farmland in Manitoba, Canada. The family took the move out west four years ago to allow their son Oliver to farm. As time has gone on they have progressively taken more land in hand and now only let out 160 acres or one quarter section.

They have a mixture of arable crops mainly wheat but with some barley; canola or oil seed rape and alfalfa are the two other main crops. With the poor prices for wheat they have let some fields for grazing but they intend to buy beef cattle for next summer and take in the final 160 acres. Crop production rate is lower than UK wheat and is usually 25-30 cwt per acre.

Tony runs two prolific vegetable gardens and a greenhouse that keep the family in vegetables nearly all the year round. We had delicious fresh peas whilst staying. Needless to say Tony cannot resist practising some forestry! Aspen is being heavily thinned around the farmhouse and underplanted with a mixture of species – you might call it enrichment that we all practised so much

in the early seventies! He had a Dunemann seedbed but this now seems to have been given over to lettuce production. Nearby are some fine 70 to 80 year old white spruce and the farmhouse is sheltered by 20 year olds which Tony is thinning!

Tony is kept pretty busy with felling, extracting and splitting the winter supply of firewood. Also on the farm are some old barns and he has been busy maintaining these so they can be used for storage. Oliver is kept occupied running the farm and is trained at welding. He is also a part-time fireman at the nearby township of Rosburn.

We were very grateful for Tony and Mary's warm hospitality and he sends his kindest regards to all who knew him and keeps in regular contact with several retired colleagues. If you want his address please contact me at **The Queen's House, Lyndhurst SO43 7NH**, tel: **02380 283141**, e-mail: **martin.fletcher@forestry.gsi.gov.uk**

For those who knew Tony in the days of the Triumph Vitesse, these days he drives a V8 3-litre Chevrolet Convertible in a similar fashion!

FCRA AGM MAY 2002

The venue for the meeting is the Forest of Dean; negotiations are underway for the AGM and the dinner will be in the re-vamped Civil Service Motoring Association Whitmead Park. It was known to many Commission staff as the home and office of the Deputy Surveyor Dean until 1968 when it was bought by the CSMA.

Any members wishing to come to the AGM may want to stay at Whitmead in either a log cabin or an apartment. There is also an adjacent camping and caravan site.

Local diversions apart from the Dean Forest itself; visit the Clearwell Caves, Ancient Iron Ore Mines; a local Free Mine (Coal); Dean Forest Steam Railway, runs from Parkend to Lydney, Sculpture Trail about 2.5 miles through the forest; Dean Heritage, a living museum.

If members don't fancy Whitmead Park there are local inns, pubs and bed and breakfast establishments. Lists of all available resting places can be obtained from John Wallace or Bart Venner.

Note the dates: **14 and 15 May.**



Betty's Pics... ...again!

Betty Kirkland (nee Saunders) has come up with another photo to jog the memory. It was taken at the Royal Show at York, date unknown. Any ideas for the FC staff? The younger man on the right of the pic was the escort.

Where are they now?

Dave Watts has been in touch as he wants to contact ex-students from the Dean FTS in his year – 1962/63. He has worked in Australia for 20 years and he would particularly welcome information about Tim Laker, Mike Richards, Peter Newt (Noot?) and David Hardy.

Dave now lives in France, so there must be a chance for a holiday there! His address is **Hougaillau 09200 Alos, France**, tel: **0033 561 663 978**.

BOTHIES AND SCHOOL VACATIONS

A aficionados of the eyeball to eyeball silvicultural debate, where never a point is allowed to slip, will recall David Paterson's forthright manner. Now in more mellow mood he recalls life as a young "DBP". Here is his story as a Glasgow schoolboy.

Hands up those hardy characters who began their forestry vocation in the bothies of the post-war era! I have been recalling those I knew in my schooldays in the late 1940s when I was attending Eastbank Academy in Glasgow and the late Sandy Morrison was in Jordanhill. You had to apply for a summer job by waiting around in the terrifying corridors of the Conservancy office in Renfrew Street until someone noticed you. Thence you were despatched with a travel warrant to the midge-infested backwoods of Argyll. I first met Sandy at this time and did not see him again until I walked into the Balloch Culloden office in autumn 1955 on my first day as probationer DO – see below.

My first 'dear little home in the west' in 1948 was one of a group of wooden Spider buildings at the old torpedo-testing depot at Ardentenny where the forestry lads were housed next to the toughest bunch of Irish navvies you ever saw, with enormous biceps, recruited to build forest roads by shovel and barrow. Our job was to weed the bracken-covered hillsides of Loch Long under the supervision of Jake, the ganger, one of the old school who would not allow retreat to canvas shelter from the July/August deluges until they reached the intensity of a Calcutta monsoon. He had an unerring way of finding the leading shoots of larch we had beheaded and hidden. Daily we returned drenched to the skin to the Spider and fuelled up the stove, adding diesel oil pinched from the lighting set engine supplies in order to get a red glow to dry the ranks of sodden clothing. When anyone left the room, and his clothes were nearer the stove, you swopped around to take prime toasting spot. By evening, darkness descended as the lighting set pattered out from lack of fuel. Food was 'rudimentary', supplied by blackened galley cooks, wearing greasy stained aprons and a glazed look from imbibing liquids other than cooking oil.

Saturday night (remember you worked on Saturday mornings then) was a dangerous time as everyone took the bus to experience the night life of Dunoon but returned rather 'the waur o' the wear', as my Granny would say. Returning to barracks would be the signal for the Irish navvies to go looking for innocent forestry lads to beat up and it was very wise to make yourself scarce so that they threw out your belongings and beds and not you.

Angie McKay would occasionally give us weeding of Poa grass in stand-over stocks of 2+2+1+ NS in the nursery to feed that batch of midges; or let us weed the Monkey puzzle plot which was so distinctive a green that you could not possibly cut a leader off! I also recall draining and turving higher up the hill where midges could assemble in strength as a grey cloud behind every head, leading previously sane students to down tools and run uphill screaming oaths like madmen. At last we went back to

Glasgow having learnt that midge-infested bracken was the climax vegetation in Argyll; and that roads squads were not to be trifled with.

The glorious summer of July 1949 provided a change of geography to the Spiders at Connel Ferry for work in Barcaldine. The Rangers seemed to have a supply contract with the cook and eventually we had to stage a strike from excess of venison after having it as sliced haunch, stew, mince, rissoles and venison pie, followed by the same again. Venison curry would have been a change but this was well before the Indian period of Scottish cuisine. The lovely sunny summer was marred by weeding nursery beds endlessly, relieved by having deep discussions on everything from art to philosophy, as there was a wide student mix. We breathed in our share of dioxins from the white spirit which was being used experimentally as a weedkiller, scorching more seedlings than weeds. Chasing railway fires on bicycles up the Ballachulish line at weekends was for the keen forestry types earning brownie points; or was it for the extra pay? The Forester staff – old Cameron and Tony Polworth – were thoughtful and ensured that the forestry lads had a shot at most tasks. We always stood up on the lorry coming back, hanging on to the roof of the cab to get cooled off – wonder what HSE would say to that? We had learned how to avoid roads squads but there was always a frisson of danger as they spoke of tossing us off the railway bridge at Corran to see if you survived the Falls of Lora. Crossing the bridge without paying was the weekend amusement. Cycling the Dalmally-Glencoe circular route on a bike with no gears, or cycling to climb Ben Cruachan, was not amusing and had a drastic effect on Monday output.

Glenbranter was the venue in 1950. We were housed in wooden huts surrounded by rhododendrons. Here we got into the big time, issued with saws and heavy axes (who mentioned training or safety?) and sent to do thinning in the SS. Hung-up trees were dealt with by sending for the local lad on the squad whose muscular development had thwarted his mental ability. He could also move enormous boulders when doing drains maintenance. Mosquitoes joined forces with the Argyll midge to make life a veritable hell as we sweated salt under muslin veils.

There had been a long history of employing funny characters from Glasgow – I recall my brother-in-law telling me of his employment as a conscientious objector, brashing on Loch Eck-side for months on end. One day one lad came to that mental state which we all recall and he brashed several trees from bottom to top. The effect was dramatic and unusual but Forester Stewart was not amused and despatched him back to Glasgow. We mentally pinned a VC on the chest for this courageous chap.

One task we did queue up for was extraction by CGI flumes erected straight downhill – there was always plenty of rain to speed the trees on their descent and their terminal velocity required one to be very fleet of foot. Enjoying the fun no end, we were disappointed when the method was abandoned as matchsticks were not part of the product mix we could sell.

Thus was the schoolboy prepared for his future career and I returned to Glasgow to hear a careers talk by 'Fergie' of Edinburgh University. He said schoolboys had little chance of entry as forestry was one of the most popular choices by returning ex-Servicemen. And to think I had lodged in these bothies, worked for pitiful pay and been eaten by midges for three summers in vain! So next year it was assisting Tom Dalgleish in Kilmarnock on consultant work living in hotels – no more bothies for me!

Little did I know it but I was to encounter bothies all over again in North conservancy when I arrived there in 1955. I thought I had done my time on stocktaking HQ stores at Nicosia, Cyprus in National service but the late Sandy Morrison nicely side-stepped and it was my turn to do the stocktaking in Farigaig bothy. Bothies always seemed very dark inside and this was used with great skill by the cook to hide all the stock deficiencies. "I'm sure I've seen these blankets before?" "Displaced persons" were commonly found in bothies – washed up by the War and with nowhere safe to go back to. This presented many language difficulties in "who stole the spoons?" investigations.

One of the last bothies I remember was the one hidden in the dense rocky undergrowth of Longart, near Garve. My memory gets rusty but my visit was probably to persuade the last occupant to leave. Everyone had forgotten he was there.

So, how about the rest of you coming up with your bothy stories?

What's in a Name?

Readers will recall that there is a proposal to change the boring name FCRA NEWS to something more in keeping with active FC retirees.

Previously we had

- THE VETERAN FORESTER
- EVERGREEN
- THE FORWARDER
- THE SENIORS
- THE ELDERS
- THE CEDARS
- THE OAKS
- NEWS FORUS

Since the last issue, I have received

- FCEX – I quite like this, it's a snappy idea but a little close to FCUK!
- HEARTS OF OAK
- FOREVERGREEN – a modification of the earlier idea.
- SECOND GROWTH – Regrowth is also possible, both are also neat ideas.

We definitely have something useful here. What support is there for any of the above titles? Drop me a card, or phone me.

Talking Taproots

Ann Moules published this book in 1998, but she suspects that there are still some who are not aware and would welcome a copy. For those who have missed it, it is a collection of anecdotes told by members of the Forestry Commission from 1933-68. The accounts are from many branches of the FC and most parts of the country. Geoff Rouse gives a very personal and detailed account, from being District Officer in wartime Britain, East Anglia, to being sent to Corsica in 1943, and much more. There are also stories of camp life at Kielder and amusing accounts from private forests. The material gives a good insight into life in the FC, peppered with humour, photos and illustrations. For a copy write to **Ann Moules, 7 Somerset Way, Taverham, Norwich NR8 6TJ** with a £4 cheque or Postal Order which includes postage.

Monkey Puzzle is Forest Puzzle

Jock Low has again(!) been in contact, this time a quest for information. He and Vincent Mullooney were chatting about the old Directorate days in Wales in the late 50s. They recalled that it was decided to extend planting from 1,500' to 1,800' at Hafren. Jock and the Forester, Moy Jones, went over the proposed area and came across a small high elevation plantation of Monkey Puzzle (*A. araucana*) about 3' - 4' high and much neglected. The adjacent area was subsequently ploughed and planted, and Jock was wondering what fate befell the Monkey Puzzle plot. Any ideas? Is it still there? Whose brainchild was it? What did it prove?

FASKALLY REUNION

How about a reunion! A great opportunity to see friends and colleagues, to share yarns and reminiscences, to have good food and drinks and to enjoy the attractive surroundings of Pitlochry – the heart of forestry.

Any member of the 1963-65 Faskally FTS intake who would be interested in a reunion should contact **Dave Marsden (01242 675720)** or **Don Furness (01642 778302)**.

Globe Trotting House adds Miles!

Derek House, an ex-forester, who retired to St Leonards in Sussex, has done an estimate of retirement mileage. Most of us do travel, but few have done more. This is his account.

Some of us retired Foresters, with the help of the RFS, have seen quite a lot of world forests together with their supporting environment. Articles would prove too numerous to print, but perhaps a table of distance covered with a variety of locations wouldn't be too difficult to mention. My personal travels over the past eight years include Sabie Forest, Kruger National Park, Table Mountain, South Africa, Bulgarian forests, Swedish forests, Californian Redwood of Yosemite and Sequoia National Park, Monterey, Oregon Douglas Fir in National Parks of Mts St Helens, Hood, Rainier, Olympus and Vancouver Island. Total estimated mileage 48,000 miles. Who knows together we may be able to come up with a World Foresters Guide.

Relating to outdoor activities this summer, some of us ex-servicemen are spanning the War years from World War I, in visiting Souilly north east France, a battlefield reforested by the State, for an Airborne Forces day. There will be trips in a captive balloon for ex-Para Regiment Association, and marching to massed bands.

YOU ARE STILL ELIGIBLE FOR THE CSMA

It's never too late to join the Civil Service Motoring Association. Along with 357,000 members you could enjoy over 50 benefits for only £15 per annum. Another benefit is membership of Britannia Rescue for £33.45 per annum. The magazine, 10 times a year, lists privileged rates for car, home, travel and caravan insurance, and there is information on discounted holidays, ferries, electrical goods, new and used cars.

For further information contact **0800 413 076** or **www.csma.uk.com**
Address: **Britannia House, 21 Station Road, Brighton BN1 4DE.**

Welcome to Retirement!

Ron Elliott	Edinburgh
Alex Cameron	Fochabers
David Davies	Carmarthen
B Hopkins	Rhondda
John Johnston	Aberfoyle
William McKie	Newton Stewart
D Winsland	Bournemouth
Derek Benoy	Edinburgh
Pauline Newell	Farnham
Godfrey Savage	Woodbridge
Dennis Rogers	Bridgend
Douglas Stansfield	Fort William
Duncan Cameron	Taynuilt
John Armour	Colwyn Bay
Cuthbert Adamson	Aberystwyth
Edward Arthurs	Lasswade
Fredrick Eckton	Builth Wells
Charles Campbell	Campbeltown
William Edgar	Moffat
Desmond Cresswell	Leominster

Tony burns it up for retirement

Tony Burns, now retired to Castle Douglas, sent me an enjoyable story of Jock Low and his influence on young foresters at the FTS – but more of that in the next issue. Tony also told me a little of his life in retirement – here it is.

After forty-one years service, I adopted the hedonistic approach to retirement and decided to fulfil travel ambitions.

Within two weeks I was crewing on a square-rigged tall ship in the Caribbean and trying to sound sympathetic when my wife reported snowdrifts in Scotland. Lifelong dreams were realised when, with the sun warm on my back, I clambered out along swaying yards of furl sails, watched glittering silvery flying fish skitter from under the bow and stood my watch at the wheel. That trip lasted six weeks but began an association with the ship, which included a winter passage across the Atlantic, only ending when it was recently sold.

We tend to spend four to six months a year on our travels, June is usually spent touring France and Spain and November or December in the British

Virgin Islands where one of our sons lives. Of course, that's a duty family visit, not a holiday! Among the highlights of our travels have been a trek to the north and south faces of Kanchenjunga, camping on the banks of the Zambezi and fishing for tiger fish, touring and camping in the National Parks of the USA, hearing bears snuffling round the tent in the Sequoia National Park and thinking of the first rule for survival "Always keep your wife between you and the bear!", camping in the amazing Bungle Bungles in Western Australia, and driving down the east coast in a campervan, sailing through the islands of Tonga and Fiji with John and Carol Boyd (FA South Scotland), who have almost completed a circumnavigation of the world. (Now there is an adventure story!)

Nearer to home, I keep knocking off a few Munros each year and I cycled from Lands end to John o' Groats two years ago.

Next year, I hope to take a year out to build a house, then resume our travels. I've always wanted to stand on Tierra del Fuego....

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OBITUARIES

Bart Venner remembers JEFF CARTER who attended Benmore FTS and was posted to the Borders. He transferred to the Dean to work with Forest Research in 1963 and helped create the first team of Field Surveys in the area. He was posted to the Dean on a beat in 1966 and later was 4 years on production. He became Forest Warden in charge of Recreation from 1975 and transformed the camping, caravanning and school visits system. However Jeff is best known for his organisation and running of the Royal Show stand at Stoneleigh for more years than people can remember. Unfortunately ill-health forced him to retire at aged 58; he in the end made it to just past his 65th birthday.

Henry Smith of Winchester recalls ANDY DEVINE who died in 2000. He was born in 1917 and attached to Dean FTS in 1951/53. He was posted to Hunsley and Marefield and finally New from where he retired.

Norman Jones of Shrewsbury has many stories of GEORGE EVAN JONES known to friends as George bach y Forestry. He died aged 76 last July, having spent all his life in Gwel ystwyth, Llanafan moving into a new house in 1953.

Through the '50s and '60s he drove the forestry lorry, carrying (and loading) pit props for the coal mines in Wrexham and Dawley, timber to the paper mills and plants to other forests. His favourite wagon was the ERF with a top speed of about 25 mph. In those days the forestry employed well over a hundred men in the valley and was administered by Tom Jones, his father and a small team from a corrugated shed in Tynbedw. The railway ran through the wood from Dolfor to Tyngraig. Every summer gangs of men would stop whatever they were doing and rush up to the line to beat out fires that were started regularly by sparks flying from the Aber-Carmarthen steam trains.

In the '70s he became a mobile mechanic, repairing heavy machinery in the wood. He was a very practical engineer who could repair just about anything mechanical or electrical.

He retired with 51 years service to his country and was proud of it. Since retiring George and Joan enjoyed travel and drove all over Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Spain. He was tall, strong and enjoyed a laugh and leg pulling. He called a spade a spade. He saw the first motor cars, tarmac, telephone and electricity come to Llanfan and witnessed an age of much change.

Norman Brown of Peebles has gathered stories of MAURIUS (MAURICE) CARRUTHERS from Margaret Gebbie, Andy Liddell and Archie Paul.

Maurius was an able and conscientious Forester who probably did more than his share of worrying. However this was more than offset by a pawky sense of humour which was never very far from the surface and frequently delighted his colleagues and many friends. At one Foresters' dressed up social evening he spotted a colleague who was short and plump with a florid complexion, sitting on the stairs off the hotel

FAREWELL

		Retired	Aged
Stanley Drew	Cinderford	1972	81
Hugh Jones	Pentraeth	1984	80
Alexander Lennon	Elgin	2000	47
John Paton	Narborough	1982	84
William Ross	Lochgilthead	-	70
Oswald Williams	Llanrwst	-	62
James Cameron	Bonar Bridge	1977	89
David McCulloch	Peebles	1988	67
Thomas Bell	Lockerbie	1993	73
Reginald Elliott	Horsham	1973	73
Thomas Griffin	Moffat	1988	76
James Henderson	Aberfoyle	1988	78
Victor Holt	Warminster	1973	87
James McArthur	Bradford	1977	81
Alexander McDougall	Aberfeldy	1985	80
Hugh McGregor	Lochgilthead	1987	71
Maurice Raven	Thetford	1993	62
Mr Wade	Newark	1988	77
James Walsh	Blaenau Ffestiniog	1990	75
Thomas Winter	Newcastleton	1978	81
Nelson Young	Thetford	1982	81
James MacRae	Kyle of Lochalsh	1995	71

foyer. "There he was", said Marius, "sitting there like an advertisement for Robin Starch". He was well known for his habit of driving at high speed – perhaps a habit derived from his wartime experience in scout cars. At any rate he was instantly christened 'The Zoomer' by two small boys from the local school. It was rumoured that at a Conservancy meeting a Civil Engineer was asked about the quality of the roads in Tweed Valley. "They're good", he said, "well graded with a good surface until that Forester flays them with rubber."

His hobbies were stick making and bowls and he occasionally enjoyed a flutter on the horses. Maurius was greatly liked and respected by all with whom he had dealings and he assuredly made a very significant contribution to the productivity and beauty of the Tweed Valley forests.

David Mobbs and Alan Catchpole wrote about MIKE WEBB who died in early September. After National Service in the Military Police, Mike went to the Dean Forestry School and joined the Forest Surveys Branch (then part of Research Division). Although he did some fieldwork, Mike was mainly the 'backroom boy' in charge of survey and sample-plot measurement equipment. Being mechanically minded he was able to carry out quite complex repairs. He assisted with mesuration, surveying and crop assessment courses at Northerwood House and Lyndhurst, and visited Working Plan teams in England and Wales to check on the standard of survey and assessment work.

Involved in handling and correcting machine-generated errors in data collected during the 1965-67 Census of Woodlands, Mike became familiar with form-reading and computing equipment. In the early '70s he joined Statistics and Computing Branch as a Computer Manager, where he brought clear solutions to practical problems and organised an efficient computing facility. During the last 15 years before retirement he was posted to field duties at Hursley Forest (South Downs Forest District). This was a tough challenge as its woodlands

varied from those in heavily populated urban areas to more isolated ones. He adjusted quickly to this. Time was unimportant to him when it concerned the satisfactory completion of his work.

Mike will be remembered for his methodical and organised approach to every task, the close attention he gave to saving and recycling, the strong opinions he held against inefficiency and waste, the consideration he had for disabled people and his tireless work for charitable causes. He will be greatly missed by friends and family.

Don Furness tells of FRED NOBLE who died in August.

After training as a vehicle mechanic in the RAF he joined the FC at Shilton Forest, Yorkshire in 1960. He drove a timber wagon as well as operating a lorry-mounted wood chipper which entailed travelling throughout the whole of north England and south Scotland. During this period he was also a member of the Conservancy Ploughing Team.

When I first encountered Fred he was putting the finishing touches to the transformation of a village shop into a forest office and so professional was his partition and shelving work that I assumed him to be a member of the Estates Branch.

Forest Worker, Driver, Joiner, Mechanic, Sales Point Cashier; Fred was in every sense versatile but perhaps even more than this, his greatest attributes were his utter reliability, his steadfastness under pressure and his general willingness to tackle any job, no matter how ineluctable the working conditions.

Fred was an active and long-standing committee member of the local Borrowby Show, he also cultivated a garden that, year in year out, yielded prizewinning produce at this event. He will indeed be sorely missed, particularly by Margaret, his wife, to whom our deepest sympathies are extended.

FROM THE EDITOR

From time to time I receive letters complaining about delays in notification of deaths under the FAREWELL column, and occasionally about lack of notification on retirement.

On the former, I am entirely in the hands of the Paymaster who writes to the FCRA Secretary via FC HQ. Notifications come at irregular intervals and with varying periods of time since a death occurred. I then draw up a list for the next issue of FCRA NEWS. Delays, often lengthy, are the result of this process. I am reluctant to include a death informed by any other way in case of errors and subsequent distress. However, an obituary is a little different. I have often included one well before receiving official notification, so if you wish to mark the life and career of an FC friend or colleague, send in an obituary at any time.