

Room at the Top Aviemore 2003

This year's AGM was held at the Highlander Hotel, Aviemore. As usual it was a great time to meet friends and colleagues and catch up with news. The AGM is a necessity to ensure the smooth running of the FCA and it was well organised. However we were all looking forward to the forest excursion planned by John Keenleyside.

Forty people joined the coach for the outing, some of those had come for the outing only having been unable to attend the meeting or the dinner. The weather forecast was variable with heavy showers of rain, hail and sleet at higher levels. We were met by our host David Jardine FDM Inverness, who took us initially to the shore of Loch Morlich where he laid out maps and plans of the area. He explained the work that was going on in restoring the native pine wood and the pressures by the public using it for recreational purposes. We found it easy to believe him as soon minibuses were arriving full of enthusiastic school children. Vehicles were reversing trailer loads of canoes down to the shore and soon the tranquility of the glen changed to a buzz from the youngsters and the noise of reversing vehicles giving warning signals. Our party retreated with dignity to the depths of the forest where the ecology and wildlife of the native and planted pinewoods were explained to us. We then moved on to a point in the planted pine where an experiment in the treatment of the pinewood was being carried out by applying different thinning treatments to the plots.

During this part of the visit there were some squally showers of rain and hail, but the trees offered a degree of protection from the elements and David Jardine's enthusiasm for the subject kept us enthralled.

And so to the high point (literally!) of our trip. With eager anticipation over 30 members crowded on to the train for the eight minute journey up the funicular railway to the summit of Cairngorm Mountain. We emerged into the underground station and through the very interesting Mountain Exhibition until finally we gained access to the viewing platform.

It was difficult to find the right words to describe the view from the top - superb, fantastic, memorable all spring to mind but the most appropriate one was probably "short". Unfortunately for the entire 90 minutes of our visit visibility was, at best, 20 metres. A total white-out. Blizzard conditions.

Still, we had the compensation of eating our lunch in Britain's highest restaurant - the aptly named Ptarmigan Restaurant - and the view down the mountain as we emerged from the cloud on the return journey and saw the panorama of Glenmore and Loch Morlich spread before us, now that really was something!

A small number opted for the lunch at the forest centre. This turned out to be an excellent meal and we were treated like royalty by the staff. Many of us chose to purchase items and take the benefit for the first time of the discount offered to former employees. After lunch we went up to meet the passengers from the funicular railway. At this point the weather had deteriorated considerably. The fit and hardy souls took the guided walk with Jim Gillies down a recently built and excellently constructed path from the funicular car park to Glenmore, through the pine forest. The FC rangers have been reducing deer stocks and the result was a steady colonisation and expansion of the Scots pine woodland across the open hill. We even saw the local reindeer herd as we started down the slope. The others boarded the bus and came down to a lower level where the weather was more favourable. The bus parked in a layby and most of the occupants came out and did a section of the blue walk as the weather had improved. The two parties eventually came back together and nobody was drookit so a pleasant afternoon was had by all. A further short stop at the visitor centre drew the whole outing to a conclusion. Folks then departed in all directions, intending to meet again for the 2004 AGM to be held somewhere in Yorkshire. The local group is already working on interesting venues. See you there next year!

Wartime stories

John North, a retired head forester from the Dean, and now near Coleford, has memories of those days immediately after the war. The Government had introduced a forest workers training scheme for returning servicemen and John was one of them.

I joined in September 1947 and reported to Coreton Hall, near Bridgenorth, shortly followed by Aston Hall, Aston on Clun, near Craven Arms.

We were a motley crew as you would expect. We were introduced to our ganger in charge, Tom Attenborough who arrived on a noisy motorbike from Church Stretton. He took us under his wing and was very patient. On one occasion we were on the top of a hill called High Vinalls near Ludlow and were beating up. On the same hill but a long way off was a group of the local forest workers but we never met.

One day I went over and said "How do you do" and the reply came "You speak good English" (I had never been accused of this before) and replied "Why shouldn't I?" He added "You are not very yellow!" so I said "Why should I be?" He replied that Tom the ganger told them we were 'trainees' which was perfectly true.

Unfortunately rural Shropshire in the late 40s pronounced trainees with a 'ch', hence the "Chinese".

WELCOME TO RETIREMENT!

Brian Baud	Towcester
Frank Bebb	Llanymynech
Roger Boswell	Fleet
William Braithwaite	Langholm
Simon Malone	Thetford
Clifford Thomas	Soudley
James Wardlaw	Fochabers

Woodcraft teaching

Stiles and Bates, wood turning and hardwood suppliers near Dover have converted a Tudor stable block into a craft teaching workshop. If you are keen to improve or extend your skills in wood-turning, wood-carving, stick making, pyrography, cabinet-making and joinery, get in touch. There are a range of 1-3 day courses in these subjects. Contact Stiles & Bates, Upper Farm, Church Hill, Sutton, Dover CT15 5DF, tel: 01304 366360, e-mail www.stilesandbates.co.uk...If you decide to go, tell us about it.

From the Editor

Just three things this time. The first is what all editors dread, a blunder which exposes pretended infallibility. Even the most casual reader will have seen that our last issue was called FCA News. How can I have made such a boob? After all the comments on a new title – I apparently reinvented one already in use by the Forestry Contracting Association. I proof read the copy and failed to see the erroneous title! We used a redundant template for its layout. I had to make grovelling apology to Barry Hudson the CE of the FCA. He saw the amusing side and intends making a reference in the next issue of his FCA News to my attempts to hijack his title. It seems fashionable to resign over points of incompetence, but as there is nobody around determined to take over the post of editor, you have me for a little longer.

The second is on cycling – again. In the December issue I noted that Sustrans was looking for National Cycle Network rangers. I felt that if I was appealing to others, then I should do something – so I have. I am now a Sustrans Ranger for the cross Scotland Clyde to Forth Cycle Route No 75. Much is off road, so can I encourage locals and tourists to use it. My section is Livingston and Bathgate to Airdrie, maybe not the most scenic part of Scotland but great cycling. Look for the yellow jacket! Sustrans has 1,600 rangers, but is always look for more – how about you? (Sustrans, Freepost SWB1314 Bristol BS1 4ZZ, e-mail www.sustrans.org.uk).

You can also obtain detailed maps and guides of the network from this address.

The third is another appeal for copy. There have been complaints about a Scottish bias in FCA TODAY. That's because I receive little material from retirees in England and Wales. David Paterson's original story on bothy life in Scotland encouraged a great response from others. You'll notice that there is no bothy story in this issue. The contributions I have will be held over in an attempt to redress the perceived imbalance.

Any old photos of old machinery?

Wil Jones of Wales, recently retired from Forestry Civil Engineering (FCE), is looking for old pictures of machines working in the forest for a museum he is putting together in Wales. I am sure ancient civils have ancient photos of ancient equipment – why not look them out and be immortalised in Wil's museum! Contributors should contact Wil directly at 2 Bryn Golau, Glan y Pwll, Blaenau Ffestiniog LL41 3PH.

Buildings you cannot miss!

Readers will recall I have already mentioned the Scottish Plant Collectors' Garden. This is set in the grounds of Pitlochry Festival Theatre. To allow for the occasional inclement weather, a rain shelter has been incorporated, but what an interesting design.

Gaia Architects used a folded leaf as inspiration for the David Douglas Pavilion, which was constructed by the Carpenter Oak and Woodland Company. It is made of Scottish grown Douglas fir and native hardwoods, and beside a shelter, it will also house educational material to convey the importance of Scottish forestry and timber industries. If you wish to be associated with this project contact Nicol Dawson, tel: 01796 484600 or e-mail nick.dawson@pitlochry.org.uk

The other 'must see' building is the new National Trust for Scotland Visitor Centre at Glencoe, also designed by Gaia Architects. It may be the 'greenest' major building in Scotland and is constructed entirely out of untreated Scottish timber. It consists of a series of domestic scale buildings largely sited within and around existing trees, and having a traditional mix of surfaces of slate, white harling and timber. The floors, walls and ceilings are fully filled with recycled newsprint for insulation, while a woodchip-fired Finnish boiler is used to power the district heating system, which services all buildings.

The ecological specification of timber used can be defined under 4 criteria.

- Sourced from responsibly managed forests.
- Preferably sourced in Scotland, failing that, UK.
- Freedom from toxic chemical impregnation, and toxic or impermeable coatings.
- Designed to be durable and easily maintained with straightforward replaceability of components.

The main load-bearing components are spruce from Inveralmond Estate, near Perth. The non-structural components are also spruce from BSW at Fort William and Glenalmond Timber. The roof and wall cladding is European larch and Douglas fir, also from Glenalmond Timber, while sarking boards under slate are spruce. The flooring for heavy traffic gave more problems. However oak floorboards are cut from Highland timber supplied by Nor Build, some of it from Altyre Estate near Forres. The boards themselves are not fixed, but held by timber cover strips screwed to battens below. If necessary they can be very simply lifted, and anybody who has de-nailed old floorboards will appreciate this detail. In areas of less heavy traffic floors of sycamore and Scots pine are used. The internal ceiling lining boards are birch to give both a light feeling and to promote an abundant native tree, and are from Glen Gowrie, supplied by Pinamonti of Stirling. Scottish oak is used for all external joinery, supplied by Russwood of Newtonmore, and manufactured by Treecraft of Dornoch. Internal doors are a mix of alder, birch and ash manufactured by John Hayton of Garve.

The success of the project shows the potential when a wide range of individuals and organisations act together to achieve something out of the ordinary. I have seen neither of these buildings yet so I cannot give personal comment but they are on my summer visiting list.

AERIAL MAST RANGER BRIDGES

Retired civil engineers will be very interested in an innovative footbridge design now gaining wider use. It is much more durable and easily maintained than a timber bridge. It is constructed from specially adapted mobile phone masts fitted with non-slip wooden decking. It was designed by Geoff Freedman of the FC's Forestry Civil Engineering (FCE). There are a number of examples in use, but two recent ones are particularly interesting. The National Trust for Scotland owns Dollar Glen in the Ochils, and the original footpath had been closed due to unsafe bridges. The glen is narrow, steep-sided and with poor access. It is also an SSSI so no damage could be tolerated to the ecosystem. FCE took on the contract and all items had to be carried by hand from a base site. The bridges were successfully installed and renewed walk was opened in June last year. It is a dramatic and exciting walk – try it.

The second example was also constructed by FCE last year over a spectacular gorge. This is over the river Ystwyth near Pont Rhyd y Groes in Ceredigion in Mid-Wales.

The original miners' bridge was probably built in the 19th century and was shown on OS maps 100 years ago. It was a timber bridge with supporting struts and probably lasted until the 1930s.

The frames of the new bridge are 20 metres long and sit 11 metres above the river in the steep-sided gorge.

The launch of the steelwork was spectacular and the expertise of a local timber contractor, Clarence Biddulph, was brought in to achieve this. He and his brother Colin used a tractor with skidder equipment to carefully launch and lift the steel into place.

The scheme was funded by Pentir Pumlumon, a local community project which was supported by a grant from Cyd Coed – Welsh Woodland for all.

The new bridge is designed to enhance the neighbourhood. It gives access to the Forestry Commission's Coed Maen Arthur directly from the village of Pont Rhyd y Groes. It was christened by local primary school children dressed in the same clothes that lead miners had worn on their way to work 100 years ago.

Master of Swing

We seldom know about people's other jobs outside FC work. Bill Powell of Alice Holt was one who had another career – dance music! He joined the FC in 1971 and worked in a number of branches in Research over a period of 16 years, until he retired in 1987. This is his story.

I took early retirement from Alice Holt Research Station and joined the Retirement Association as a life member, but regret I am unable to take part in any events as I have arthritis and breathing problems which makes it very difficult to get around.

I ran a dance band for 27 years, playing mostly for Old Time but also for modern ballroom dances.

It was many years before I had regular players – I had to rely upon anyone who was available and most of the time it would be men who were home on leave from the army.

A regular booking was for the Matrons Staff Dance at Farnham Hospital annually. I

also played piano for dancing classes.

Initially I was an MC and it was through this that I was approached to play for dances but had no experience or music for the Old Time rhythms which required quite different tempos – I mastered these and after a while the bookings started coming in and it was necessary to organise regular band members. I was fortunate in this respect, finding experienced players. Our engagements included formation dancing, requiring very strict tempos and timing and competition dancing for juniors and adults.

One big event was at Farnham Castle and another memorable occasion was the area final for Old Time ballroom dancing for the Butlin's Open Amateur Valeta Trophy, held at Huntley & Palmers of Reading, Berkshire.

The clubs and organisers are no longer around but they were good days and we had some enjoyable evenings.

I still enjoy playing the piano but regret that I am unable to spend much time on the keyboard because of the arthritis.

High performance vehicles...

Some years ago Doug Petty, the Conservancy Mechanical Engineer in NE England sent the following memo to all drivers of FC vehicles. It was an aid to vehicle recognition and to their unique mechanical properties not found elsewhere. Does this bring back memories? Perhaps they are still designed this way today, or have times moved on?

- They travel faster in ALL gears, especially reverse.
- They accelerate at a phenomenal rate.
- They enjoy a much shorter braking distance.
- They have a much tighter turning circle.
- They can take ramps at twice the speed of private cars.
- Battery, water, oil and tyre pressures do not need to be checked nearly so often.
- The floor is shaped just like an ashtray.
- They do not require to be garaged at night.
- Can be driven for up to 100 miles with oil warning light flashing.
- They need cleaning less often, especially inside.
- The suspension is reinforced to allow carriage of concrete slabs and other heavy building materials.
- They are adapted to allow reverse gear to be engaged while the car is still moving forwards.
- The tyre walls are designed to allow bumping into and over kerbstones.
- Unusual and alarming engine noises are easily eliminated by the adjustment of the fitted radio volume control.
- No security needed. May be left anywhere, unlocked, with the keys in the ignition.
- They have an aversion to any form of maintenance.

Tree Aid

Tree Aid had major media exposure at Christmas as part of the Independent's Christmas Hope for Africa Appeal. The £400,000 raised was divided between 3 charities, of which Tree Aid was one. For those who did not read the articles on life on the edge of the Sahara, it's hard to imagine the stress of living in a hot and arid area. In Burkino Faso the present landscape is a wreck. Until 20 years ago it was a thick, dry forest teeming with wildlife, and with plants used for all aspects of village life. Now it is dust with scattered scrub. Women leave at 4 am daily in their search for firewood. Because the forest has been hacked down they tramp 6 to 12 miles to find any dead wood suitable for cooking fires. When day comes all one sees is

travelling firewood. Everything that can carry twigs and branches, trundles along. Overladen trucks, cars, carts and women's heads. The situation is unsustainable.

This is why local tree nurseries are vitally important. Skills in plant raising, planting and maintenance are taught. Everyone in a village is asked to plant trees, and small woodlots are being established. Although the main tree used is eucalyptus as it can be harvested for fuel wood in 5 years, others are very important, shea and dawadawa as food species and mango and guava.

Tree Aid's vision is to see thriving self-reliant communities in Africa's drylands through the sustainable use of trees and woods.

If you want to become more involved contact Tree Aid, Freepost BS 8866 Bristol BS2 8ZZ, e-mail www.treeaid.org.uk

Who's who?...

Fred Hummel sent this photograph of 35 senior staff taken in Scotland in 1969 in connection with the 50th anniversary celebration of the FC. You can enjoy yourselves with identification. Fred provided a check list, so I know them all – do you?

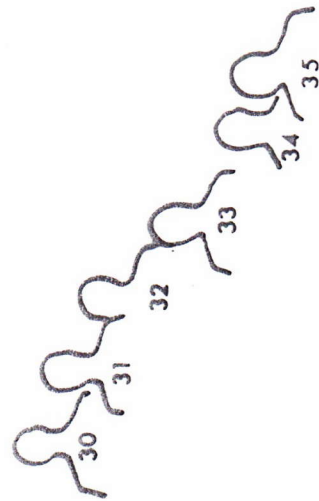


Commissioners' visit to Wales 1968

Visit to Scotland

in connection with

50th celebrations



1. R. B. Verney, D.L., J.P.
2. H. J. Watkins
3. A. Watt, C.B.E.
4. Maj. Sir William Strang Steel, Bt.
5. J. A. Dickson
6. L. A. W. Jenkins
7. M. Compton
8. Alderman E. Gwynfryn Davies, J.P.
- 9. F. C. Hummel
10. G. Forrest
11. T. H. McGeorge
12. G. W. Backhouse
13. J. Q. Williamson, M.B.E.
14. L. H. Williams
15. J. P. Lenman
16. J. J. V. Summers
17. C.A.J. Barrington, O.B.E.
18. H. A. Maxwell
19. E. R. Macmillan
20. J. E. James
21. J. W. L. Zehetmayr
22. J. S. R. Chard
23. J. H. James
24. G. D. Holmes
25. D. H. Phillips
26. G. I. Mackenzie
27. B. W. Holtam
28. E. G. Richards, M.C.
29. G. D. Rouse
30. P. F. Garthwaite
31. D. R. Johnston
32. D. A. Mithen
33. G. G. Stewart, M.C.
34. G. E. Godwin
35. J. R. Booth

OBITUARIES

MIKE LOCKE had very many friends and a large number contributed to this obituary. I was pleased that I could give an eulogy at his funeral which I compiled from these contributions. As a young man he was brought up in Edinburgh but also roamed the Kyles of Bute rowing and fishing. These were to remain enjoyable activities in his life. After graduating from Edinburgh in 1948 he joined the FC at Alice Holt as Census Officer in the Mensuration Section. Fred Hummel recalls that he arrived in the middle of a children's Christmas party and immediately entered into the spirit of it. His first task was to organise the storage and retrieval of the 1947 census data which he did methodically and meticulously. He also used the data to provide estimates of timber availability to aid the establishment of new forest industries. George Holmes remarked that if he wrote or said anything in his field of expertise, you could stake your life on it being right.

Because of his quiet and unassuming nature he was often taken for granted but he was the right man at the right time for producing census and production data for the forests of GB. Throughout his career he was a leading expert and unfailing source of information, opinions and new ideas. Andy Neustein said that he remained the organiser and producer of the quantitative facts of the FC's and private woodlands, which were critical to the developing timber industries. The FC was fortunate to have in Mike someone who could distil this enormous collection of data into reliable and useful portions, and was always able to interpret it. One sad definition of an expert is someone who can make something simple complicated – Mike did the reverse, and was unfailingly helpful with the clueless.

Mike's staff also have great praise for him. David Mobbs, John Proudfoot and Keith Ball, said what they most admired in him was his ability to be aware of each individual's opinions and abilities and to be able to bring out the best in them. He was considered the most reliable and fair-minded boss and working colleague that one could have.

In his retirement he was a regular supporter of the local FCA group and kept up his friendship with his ex-FC colleagues. He also continued his hobby as a keen fisherman, fishing for trout in the Borders lochs and River Tweed.

Again George Holmes considered that he was known and greatly respected for his professionalism and total integrity. He recalled that Mike was brave and stoical as he found in his last conversation with him only weeks before he died. He knew his days were numbered. He accepted this calmly and philosophically which he found moving and very typical of Mike.

Mike enriched the lives of all he knew and met and we shall miss him.

John Fletcher remembers Bill GRANT as one of those rare characters who excelled in two quite discrete areas. His professional life was

spent as a forester with the Forestry Commission and for the past 35 years he assumed the role of impresario at his beloved Theatre in the Forest at Grizedale.

He gained his Forester's Certificate from the Forest of Dean Training School in October 1939. After the war he returned to the Commission in 1948 and held various posts in Shropshire and the lake District culminating in 1964 at Grizedale Forest.

Grizedale valley was the perfect scenario for his talents and enthusiasm for people and for wildlife. From 1964 until his retirement in 1980, and in the years beyond, he was to become a force in pioneering the principle of multi-use forestry in the UK. His vibrant enthusiasm and leadership, together with his imaginative belief in the use of the forest as a source of recreation for an increasing urban population, led to the formation of the country's first nature trail at Ridding Wood and climaxed with the formation of the Grizedale Society and the Theatre in the Forest.

His knowledge of wildlife led to many innovations at Grizedale. First among these was the creation, extension and development of small tarns within the forest which led directly to the establishment of the Greylag goose as a nesting species in the lake District for the first time in 200 years. The construction of observation hides followed, enabling thousands of school children and adults to share the secret world of wildlife for the first time.

He was a founder member of the British Deer Society and played the lead role in cooperative deer management on private and Commission estates by forming groups in Eden Valley, South lakes and West Cumberland. In 1982 he was awarded the Balfour-Browne Trophy for Deer Management.

In 1968 he was awarded one of the first Churchill Travelling Fellowships and he chose to visit the USA and Canada to study wildlife conservation and forest recreation. He returned to Grizedale fired by the prospect of putting into practice the principles he had absorbed and this experience, combined with his own imaginative talents led to Grizedale Forest being recognised as a pioneering model for multiple use forests in GB. He inspired others and a band of volunteers helped to transform a hayloft into the 230 seat Theatre in the Forest which opened in 1970 following the birth of the Grizedale Society the year before. Not least amongst his achievements was to persuade senior colleagues in the bureaucratic world of the Forestry Commission that his visionary ideas were worth pursuing. It was the same infectious enthusiasm that persuaded donors to purchase a Steinway Grand Piano and to attract world renowned artistes to the Theatre and to found the Grizedale International Piano Festival. So impressed were the Trustees of the Churchill Fellowship that Bill was invited to apply for a further scholarship in 1977. He used it to tour Europe in order to consolidate his wildlife management skills.

As a result of his enthusiasm for the arts Grizedale Forest became a setting for one of the largest Sculptures in the landscape in Europe. The creations of several eminent sculptors in the forest complemented the works of many young sculptors who were able to display their work publicly for the first time. Bill's achievements were endorsed by the Arts Council for GB, by the Gulbenkian Foundation and by many individuals. His work received the premier prize of £1 00,000 from the Prudential Awards for the Arts, heading off competition from museums and galleries throughout the country. Locally he won the Bernard Gooch Award for services to tourism in Cumbria. In 1973 he received the award of MBE for services to forestry and in 1996 the OBE for services to environmental protection and the arts.

His life and work and the awards which followed were based on boundless enthusiasm, on the gift of inspiring those around him and on an innate knowledge and love of the countryside.

GEORGE MOWER's wife would like her husband, who retired to Chelmsford, to be remembered. He had worked in Thetford Forest for over 33 years.

Obituaries for JOHN DAVIES, JUNIOR PRIOR, IAN WATT, BOB IRVING, WARREN HENMAN, VILNIS GRANT and PETER LEGARD may appear in the future issues.

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