



Partnerships for Commission's Camp and Cabin Sites

Retirement has been a great time for us to visit the country at our convenience and to go camping. I am sure you will have been to some of the Forestry Commission sites, so be prepared for major changes over the next few years.

The Commission and the Camping & Caravanning Club (CCC) have formed a joint venture which has retained the Forest Holidays name and now has a 75-year lease of the camp and cabin sites. It is the first public-private partnership in the UK's tourist industry. The CCC plans to invest £10 million refurbishing them over the next five years. Overall investment will be about £40 million over the next 10 years, because plans are already in hand for a new cabin site. Although development of the sites will take place, their unique forest ambiance will be conserved.

Forest Holidays recently moved from Silvan House to the Conkers outdoor leisure centre at Moira, Derbyshire, in the heart of the National Forest. For this year at least it will be "business as usual" with Forest Holidays administering the sites. The rolling refurbishment programme will begin next winter.



The *touchwood* History Project

By Roland Stiven

The *touchwood history* project is a pilot initiative being taken forward by Forestry Commission Scotland, the University of the Highlands and Islands History Faculty and HI-Arts, as part of *touchwood* – Forestry Commission Scotland's programme of events to celebrate Scotland's Year Of Highland Culture in 2007.

Keeping up with the latest developments in forestry is hard work these days; the priorities seem to change every year or so. Maybe the pace was slower in the past, but great changes have taken place nonetheless.

Since the Forestry Commission was founded in 1919 it has had an extraordinary impact on the land and communities of Scotland. In the process it has touched the lives of many people, particularly in the Highlands and Islands and Argyll, where some of the earliest developments took place.

The *touchwood* History Project will capture memories of earlier times by recording interviews with people who have been involved in forestry over the years. The project is starting off in two areas – Fort Augustus and mid-Argyll. Volunteers from the local communities have been trained in the basic techniques of recording and, together with a professional oral historian from Aberdeen University, they have so far undertaken about 25 interviews. The interviews will form part of a national archive of written and spoken material that will trace the story of modern forestry.

Open days have been held in each area, attracting a mix of people including retired

foresters and forest workers, their wives and children and many others interested in their local heritage. Along with memories they brought along photos, documents, uniforms, clothes, forest tools and old forest signs.

Later in the year, the project will publish two booklets charting the history of the Forestry Commission in each area. There will also be a small exhibition relating to the work at the *touchwood* Festival in Dingwall on the 1st & 2nd of June 2007.

A *touchwood* website will feature photos collected during the open days, along with historic documents and audio and video clips. It will also allow those of you with experiences to share to feed your memories into the project via a 'forest memories' blog. Follow the links from the main *touchwood* website www.touchwood2007.org.uk. If computers are not your "thing", there are also more traditional ways of contributing to the project, so if you have photos or stories to contribute, please contact:

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In the longer term it is hoped that the recording of oral histories will expand beyond the two pilot areas to cover further areas of the Highlands. There are already local heritage projects looking into the history of forestry in other parts of Scotland, in Galloway, Cowal and Lanarkshire, for example, and it is hoped other groups may be inspired to become involved.

Letters to the Editor



Dear Richard,

I was intrigued to read in the December issue of FCA News about Dughall Mor, now the tallest tree in Britain, and of the fertility rites being enacted to encourage further growth.

The stand in Reeling Glen of which Dughall Mor is a member is quite a small one (it is referred to briefly at bottom of page 403 of Alan Mitchell's *Field Guide to the Trees of Britain and Northern Europe*). And it was there, on a beautiful autumn afternoon many, many years ago, that I and a chaste young woman, out walking, sat and then lay down.

We remained there for quite some time, and when we rose to go, the young woman was, well, still young. I cannot say whether this dalliance took place right beneath a then much younger Dughall, hypsometry being far from my thoughts that day. But if not, he was probably an interested observer.

So the lads and lasses of Inverness District now doing their best to encourage him may well be on to something.

That once young woman and I are, many decades later, still together, so to avoid her exceeding wrath, I must remain.

ANON,

This charming story intrigued me also. Who was it? I e-mailed back. A clue – please! I also said, "Why not visit Dugall again to check whether the same old magic is still working". I received an entertaining reply:

"The spirit remains willing, but the ancient flesh, although it might just about manage the climb, would by then have expended all its vigour. Unless, of course, the fairies who nurtured Dugall were to divert a little of their magic our way. "Dum spiro spero".

Here, albeit with a little hesitation, is an anagram of the names which appear on my birth certificate: ANN SCANS WITHER'D FORESTER."

So now you know – or do you?

The Forestry Commission's Dublin Bothy in the 1950s

By John Keenleyside

Part 2: Accommodation and way of life

The bothy was a wooden building with a corrugated iron roof, and walls of rough-sawn timber with laths on the outside at the joins of the boards. It was creosoted annually to preserve the wood and ensure that in the event of a fire it would burn well.

The corrugated iron on the roof used to make noises in summer as it expanded, and similar noises in winter on frosty nights as it contracted. A general rattle occurred on windy nights when the wind vibrated the loose sheets.

Internally there was a kitchen with a huge ex-army cooking stove which consumed copious amounts of coal to do minimum amounts of cooking and water heating. The main function seemed to be to keep Wattie the cook warm, because he only wore light clothes summer and winter, whatever the weather.

There was a dining room with basic facilities. It had ex-army folding tables with bare board surfaces which were occasionally scrubbed. There were long, wooden, folding forms which assumed that everyone was of the same dimensions. When the road squad was in it was tactical not to sit on the same side of the table as the road roller driver, because it was difficult to reach the food. It seemed to be a qualification for that job that one must be round and portly to add weight to the roller.

One comforting thing was a fire extinguisher on the wall, placed prominently and checked regularly. I do not remember

any form of heating in the dining room, because I can recall seeing my breath at breakfast on a cold winter's morning.

The dormitory was an open room with bare boards on the floor and 16 beds up each side. They were single, narrow and uncomfortable, and of ex-army origin. The only private furniture was an individual small, single wardrobe with a top shelf. There was a hasp and padlock on the door which would deter an honest thief for two minutes at least.

There were two ex-army stoves in this room for which the Commission supplied low-grade, wet, pine firewood. The inmates had to light these stoves after returning from work in the hope that there would be some sign of heat by the time they had eaten their meal, which usually took a maximum of 10 minutes. They were more likely to come back from the dining room to find them out, or emitting steam from the wet logs - or noxious fumes, if someone had added creosote to their recipe for success in lighting the stoves.

Often when the road squad was in, diesel fumes emitted from the stoves, because cotton waste soaked in diesel was part of their recipe for success. Some bright sparks used methylated spirit, supplied for lighting the Tilley lamp, to get a quick response. Others drank the meths to improve their personal heating system. The authorities rumbled to this one, so Wattie was put in charge of the methylated spirit. He only issued two little pads soaked in the spirit, which clipped on to the vaporiser of each lamp to get it going. The two Tilley lamps were the only source of light and had to be carried from dormitory to dining room, to wash room and to toilets. Some of the inmates preferred to contemplate in the dark.

One of my hobbies at the time was making marquetry pictures, but the level of light was not sufficient to ensure the accuracy required in cutting the veneers to the required standard. Sometimes the light was obscured by fumes from the stove, and on rare occasions by a heat haze from the tin chimneys.

I was usually later than the others in returning from work, so they decreed that my chore was to clear the ashes from the stoves, which I did religiously before going to work each morning. On one occasion I had been working in the far north all week, and on arriving at the bothy on Friday night found that there were so many ashes on the concrete hearths of the two stoves that I had to take a wheelbarrow in to remove them.

The ablution block was a lean-to add-on to the main building, and made of corrugated iron. It was not lined or insulated from the cold or the noises which emitted from the toilet cubicles. There were three showers in this building. To operate them successfully required a degree in

Zhoushan Islands, China

By Martin Fletcher

In the July issue I described my assignment to Mount Hua. My second BESO assignment in October 2005 took me to the Zhoushan Islands, an archipelago about 100 miles south of Shanghai in Zhejiang Province. The client was the Zhoushan Forestry Research Institute, which had requested advice on diversity of species for urban planting, and nursery techniques. At latitude 29S, it was on the southern limit of my temperate forest knowledge.

The first day started with a high-profile meeting at the Institute with professors, directors and vice-directors, with an exhausting two hours of questions. Fortunately I was able to break off and tell them about the New Forest, with the aid of a tourist map and leaflets. We then discussed the zoha nursery, which had an annual production of 500,000. I circulated "Nursery Practice" FC Bulletin 43, which was a big hit. I showed the photographs of the seedbed and transplant line machinery, which were taken at various Forestry Commission heathland nurseries.

The disconcerting outcome of this meeting was that they wanted a full-day series of lectures at the end of my stay, whereas I understood I had come to do visits, advise and leave a report. A meeting room and an interpreter were booked, so there was no getting out of it. In the morning I talked to my report. After a two-hour lunch break, we had a questions session and photos of the New Forest from my CD. These really interested them, particularly the foresters who had been wheeled out of retirement.

I also advised on a wide range of other subjects. These covered littoral and sand dune shelterbelt management, landscape restoration of quarry faces, protection of rare camellia species, salinity reduction after maritime reclamation, maintenance of veteran trees, and increased return from the forest resource.

On the latter issue, I made a point of going into many of the florists' shops in Dinghai, the city where I was based, to see what foliage they were using. Sure enough they were using juvenile juniper (*Juniperus chinensis*). So I posed a question in the final report. Are these florists paying for this foliage? It seemed unlikely!

Some aspects had to wait until my return to the UK. I needed information on salt-tolerant species, and I have asked colleagues in Staatsbosbeheer, the Dutch Forest Service, for advice.

One technique I was able to explain was water access to the lower root zone when planting large standards. For a few yuan, I purchased two lengths of plastic corrugated waste pipe. By puncturing them with a screwdriver I could demonstrate how to lay these pipes in the pre-dug hole before lowering in the tree root ball. On my return I sent samples of perforated land drainage pipe with installation drawings.

The whole trip was a great experience. The climate was Mediterranean and on tour I visited three other islands, including at one a quick dip in the East China Sea. I also spent a few days at Huashan in Shaanxi Province in central China, where I was in 2004. There they were keen to show me the results of some of my recommendations that they had adopted. We also had further useful discussions on bark beetle damage to the pines growing between 5000 and 6000 feet.

As on my previous trip, it was enjoyable and a great experience.

plumbing or in patience, to achieve and maintain the correct temperature. If a toilet was flushed when a shower was in use there was a risk of scalding, and a 5-minute delay while the cistern refilled. Icicles hung from them on frosty mornings. That didn't matter much, because the inmates were not up early enough to enjoy the luxury of a shower before a 7.30am start.

There was no electricity, radio or television. Some of the wealthy farmers in the glen had black and white television, but if I went to view one, I was not sure whether I was seeing a blizzard on Ben Wyvis or a sand storm in Saudi. I had a portable mains/battery radio, but because there was no power, it was on battery most of the time. The inmates must have used it when I was not in, because on my return it always seemed to be warm. Either that, or Wattie had put it on his cooking stove or it had not been switched off since I left: I was never sure which. They marvelled at the fact that it had a plug, but went without electricity. They never acknowledged that I had to pay for the batteries that were concealed inside.

Everything in the bothy was basic. The accommodation, the food, the firewood and the facilities. There was an element of camaraderie, but I was the odd bod. They could not understand why someone in the forester grade stayed there, and neither could I. It was the necessity of being near my work and the lack of accommodation in the area that was my problem. The other problem was that to say to a prospective landlady that I was currently staying in the "Dublin" was the modern-day equivalent of saying I was "DSS". The shutters came down immediately.

The Birch in Folklore



By Karen Bell

The Birch tree is a pioneer species and was one of the first trees to re-appear after the last ice age and has been used by mankind since pre-historic times for both practical and magical purposes.

Birch bark was used for making containers and also for weaving into rope. The sap was boiled down and used as glue by the prehistoric people, and the leaves and flowers were used to produce a bright yellow dye. Birch twigs were used to beat out the evil spirits in delinquents and lunatics.

A peeled white birch wand was carried by the bride dolly at the festival of Imbloc. Birch was also reputed to have healing qualities. A tea was made from the leaves to relieve rheumatism and a pleasant drink was made from the spring sap that was said to be beneficial to the kidneys and bladder. Birch sap was also used to produce wine and this still continues to the present day.

An Adventurous Retirement

By Tony Butcher

Four years ago I chose to move away from busy Bedford for some elbow room with peace and quiet – 12000 miles away, to be precise.

My wife and I went for a month's holiday to New Zealand in 1997, and I fell in love with the country. Later I found that I had the possibility of emigrating there permanently, and accommodation was remarkably cheap. The blue skies and clear air were like a magnet. After many weeks of thinking it over I decided to spend the rest of my retirement in 'God's Own'. So we moved out in 2001.

I am pleased that I still receive both the *Slasher* and *FCA Today*, although they do come by 'whale mail' and take more than three months to get here. I think migrating birds would be a bit quicker.

In these electronic times there should be no excuse for not keeping in touch except that we change as we get older and acquire new friends, tending to neglect the old ones. I have kept up Christmas cards with one Commission friend for more than 40 years, another for 30, and a record 50 years with another, but now I am advertising my New Zealand address to readers of *FCA Today* for other reasons – tourism.

With the world shrinking annually by faster and cheaper travel, I find many visitors arriving on our doorstep from the UK and the Continent. In fact tourism is one of New Zealand's top earners, close to timber exports, sheep and dairy products. When we moved here and found money to spare, I had a large garage built with a separate room attached complete with shower and loo, intending to use it for friends and family visiting New Zealand. Naturally, it didn't get used much, so we now run this as a bed and breakfast.

We meet people from Australia, the USA, the UK and the Continent. Interestingly, we have more from Germany, but so far had only one couple from France.

Most visitors are first timers and have often not done their homework. Many fall

into the trap of thinking that New Zealand is that little island at the bottom of the globe and it won't take long to get around.

We had one couple recently who, on their first day, travelled the equivalent of Heathrow to Fishguard, stayed with us, and on their next day were heading for "Exeter". That seems sheer lunacy to me, because they will never get to see anything that way. I hasten to say these guests were not British – and they had their evening meal at McDonald's! We do meet some characters.

If you intend a visit of such great expense and distance, it pays to plan ahead. Remember that although the roads are remarkably quiet here, the distances can be vast, because we are bigger than the UK and definitely longer from top to bottom. The *Lonely Planet* and *Rough Guide* guidebooks are very good, but do not cover all the local hideaways, so we can offer advice to anyone, particularly Commission or former Commission staff.

We live by the sea near Oamaru in the South Island, so please contact us at: Tony and Andrina Butcher, 2 West View Drive, Weston, Oamaru 8901; e-mail: tonyandrina@xtra.co.nz.

February, March and April are good months to visit, being outside our summer school holidays. Our winters can be kind – they are your summer holidays, with warm sun and blue skies, even in the chilly, snow-topped mountains. Visitors at this time of the year get cheaper deals and more attention. We would love to hear from prospective travellers to discuss the 'places to see', means of transport, accommodation and to point out a few pitfalls. New Zealand is known for its scenery and hospitality, plus of course the thrills.

The South Island is more friendly and relaxed than the North Island with less than 20% of the total population - and if you are Scottish, Dunedin and the Otago region are a home from home.

You will always find a welcome with us, *so hai kona ra...* that's Maori for "Here I will stop writing my letter and say farewell."

Welding Wood

This might seem paradoxical, but there are two innovative processes under development for glueless wood welding.

The first consists of applying rapid, alternating mechanical friction to the two wood surfaces to be welded, under pressure. At the resulting high temperatures the characteristics of the lignin and cellulose which make up the cell walls change, and they start to flow. The wood fibres released become entangled in the flow and form a high-density compound on cooling. The two surfaces become bonded or "welded".

The mechanical resistance of the joint after four seconds is equivalent to that obtained 24

hours after gluing. The process can be applied to any two flat surfaces, the only limitation being that it is not suitable for exterior joints.

The second process is the high-speed rotational welding of wood dowels. A dowel in rapid rotation is inserted by means of an electric drill into the wood substrate. The resulting weld is 20 times stronger than hammer-inserted dowels, and comparable in strength with PVA glued-in dowels after 24 hours. This process is very suitable for the DIY enthusiast, because only a standard electric drill is required.

At present the processes are being developed by a joint Swiss-French research team, but they are likely to become commercially available in the not too distant future.

The Rowan in Folklore



By Karen Bell

The rowan is believed to be one of the most potently magical trees, and features strongly in Scottish folklore. It is said to give protection from evil, hence the reason you will see it

growing outside cottages and farmsteads in the Highlands. It is also often seen growing next to cairns and stone circles.

It is said that barren-ness can be cured if one makes love underneath a rowan. A hoop of rowan wood would have been used to give protection and fertility to livestock by having them jump through one at Beltane (1st May).

In days gone by, two crossed rowan branches tied with red thread would have been placed above a baby's crib to give protection to the child. This would also be placed above the entrance to barns and homes to give protection to the inhabitants.

Timber on Tracks

The Scottish Executive has announced a £7.4 million project to facilitate timber transport by rail, potentially taking 110,000 tonnes of timber, or 4400 lorry journeys a year, off single-track public roads in Scotland.

A railhead will be built near Barrhill in Arecleoch Forest in Galloway Forest District, and a Freight Multiple Unit (FMU) will transport timber throughout Britain. The FMU is under construction in Germany, and will have a built-in mobile crane.

The decision to go ahead with this train followed successful trials with moving timber to Kronospan works at Chirk. The trial unit used two driving vehicles with conventional timber wagons between. The FMU is a small, fast train that can be used during the day on passenger lines, largely avoiding the need for shunting and queuing for track access, a problem which has previously hindered efficient timber transport by rail.

It will be used to transport timber from Galloway to processing plants in Ayr, Troon, Carlisle and Chirk. Galloway Forest District is supporting the Barrhill railhead by constructing strategic forest roads which link private and public-sector forests to the railhead. This will serve the rail network and minimise timber traffic on fragile public roads and through rural communities.

There are no photos available, but watch this space.

OBITUARIES

David Rice and John White both recall **TED LEYSHON**, who died in November, aged 91.

He was brought up in Brierley in the Forest of Dean, and spent his early working life at the nearby coal pit. His love of trees persuaded him to change career, and he attained a place in the Dean Forestry School, from where he graduated in 1948.

Following time in the Genetics Branch, where he perfected his grafting and propagating skills, he was chosen to take charge of Westonbirt Arboretum in 1956.

Ahead lay a formidable task to restore this internationally important collection following partial neglect during the Second World War and subsequent lack of labour and finance prior to its passing to the nation in lieu of death duties.

Westonbirt's subsequent prosperity was due largely to Ted's monumental pioneering work. With about 20 men and very little money, he had to cut a path through brambles and scrub even to find a way in. He embarked on cataloguing and relabelling the collection to inform the ever-increasing number of visitors. He oversaw major fellings designed to improve the environment for the Rhododendron collection and to make room for the planting of a new Acer Glade, now called Leyshon Avenue.

His grand exploits in Silk Wood include Palmer Ride and Concorde Glen. The latter was named by him after the aircraft which roared overhead on its maiden flight from Bristol. The award of the Veitch Memorial Silver Medal from The Royal Horticultural Society in 1967 was in recognition of Ted's contribution to setting Westonbirt on the path to become The National Arboretum.

He retired in 1975, but was retained to work part time on identifying the remaining unknown specimens. With the possible exception of Alan Mitchell, nobody else in the Commission could have even attempted the task.

Ted's attention to detail was paramount. Often at the end of a day, sitting at his desk behind a pile of leaf and flower samples, he would announce, "Well, I can definitely tell you what it isn't". The next day would find him gathering more fresh material.

Following final retirement to nearby Malmesbury in 1981 Ted regularly visited the arboretum that he so loved until poor health precluded such activity.

If visitors today are looking for an epitaph for Ted, they should go to the Acer Glade in October. "If you seek his monument, look around you".

Martin Fletcher tells of **JOAN WITHERS**, who died last September aged 77.

Joan will be remembered for her vibrant and charismatic personality and her ability never to be daunted by the problems emerging at a busy campsite.

She and her husband Reg started at Longbeech Campsite in the New Forest in 1974. They perfected their public relations and diplomatic skills when handling Spring Bank Holidays, and later during the peak years of New Forest camping of 1978, '79 and '80.

After a mid-season crisis at Ashurst in August 1981, she and Reg took on this site for a couple of seasons. However, Reg's ailing health meant she had to move to the single-manned site at Setthorns, where she, with her beloved dog Fred, notched up a total of 12 years as its warden. During her 20 years at the New Forest campsites she met and greeted on behalf of the Forestry Commission more than three quarters of a million campers, surely a record for any Commission employee.

She had a truly memorable personality, and will be missed by all her friends, in particular by Ian and Gary, her sons, and her grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

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