

Birchcraft

by Bryce Reynard

Over the past five or six years I have taken a great interest in using the birch tree as a craft material. It probably started years ago as scout and then through a career in forestry. Although my generation of foresters was trained as Sitka farmers and taught how to ring bark birch, I always had an interest in woodcraft and backwoodsmanship. Since my ninth birthday when I had a Coronation souvenir penknife, I have always carried a knife.

I went on a basket making course in 1999 and was hooked, especially at using "free" material from the woods to make beautiful and useful things. The following year, two Danes gave a workshop on birch bark weaving in the Black Isle. They brought birch bark from Sweden. For me the event was a life changing experience. I was struck by the range of things that the Scandinavians made from our common Highland tree. We don't seem to have a birch culture here except at the back of a Raeburn fire, but I intend to change that.

Since that workshop I have used all the parts of our native birch. Having mastered the challenge of making birch bark baskets, I now see how many other items I can make from the tree without going into the saw milling stage. No part of the tree is wasted.

The roots are very strong and can be used for knot work or stitching pieces of bark together. I have found roots to be an ideal material for making earrings! Thin, leafless twigs can be used for weaving, pot scrubbers, brooms and floral art arrangements. (The lichens on the branches are great for this too).

Thicker twigs are ideal for pencils, catapults, whistles, kazoos, letter openers, seed markers and hanging baskets for flowerpots. Lengths of thin twigs threaded on thin black cord make unusual necklaces.

Main stems produce floor to ceiling lamp stands with spotlights, while holes can be



drilled for wine bottles and horizontal slots cut for CDs. Short sections make ideal holders for night lights. Thin discs can be used for coasters.

As well as baskets, the bark is useful for making Christmas decorations, gift tags, stars and bows. The texture of the bark is more akin to leather, and flowers made from thin sections are particularly attractive. Also it can be boiled to produce random curly shapes. It may be used either fresh without any treatment or stored between boards for future use. Harvesting the outer bark will not kill the tree.

Herbal tea is made from fresh new leaves and you all know about birch sap wine and shitake mushrooms. The sap can be boiled to make a syrup. However, you will have to boil 100litres of sap to get 1litre of syrup – a job for outdoors!

Dried leaves from all times of the year make a good basis for greetings cards as do thin pieces of bark, especially with lichens on. Seeds lightly glued on to cards can be recycled into the next forest afterwards! How about a "witches broom" growth for pulling up your chimney or dried rotten wood for a bee smoker?

Over the years I have been asked to make many things including bat shaped tags for a funeral wreath, zoo walking poles for a night walk on Skye, a white witches inscribed broom handle and brooms for wedding ceremonies.

Imagination is your only limit. Look at birch trees in a different light now...I feel a book coming on!

AGM 2008

David Chadwich is the organiser of our 2008 AGM, which will be held in Edinburgh on May 20th in the west boardroom of Silvan House, the Commission's HQ.

Dinner has been arranged for the evening in the Gillespie Room at Edinburgh Zoo, just across the road.

Our excursion on the next day, May 21st, has yet to be organised, but there are many interesting forests nearby. The Holiday Inn opposite Silvan House will give special rates of £95 per room per night (1 person) or £105 (2 persons). However, there is a wide range of other, cheaper accommodation in the vicinity.

Contact David for further information on telephone **01383 821216** or e-mail **chadburn@aol.com**

More on Ancient Trees

The previous issue gave some information about the Woodland Trust's project to produce a national database on ancient trees. More and more recordings are coming in and it is capturing the imagination. To date more than 10,000 trees have been measured.

However, the trust is short of verifiers in parts of Great Britain to confirm these measurements. Why not volunteer? It's enjoyable work, it gets you out, you see great trees, and your expenses are refunded.

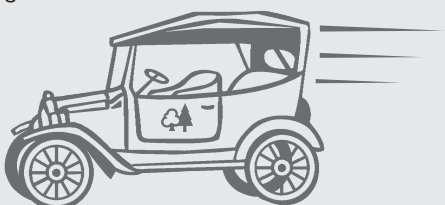
Verifiers are needed in the following areas: Highland Scotland, Scottish Southern Uplands (including Dumfries & Galloway), NE & NW England, East Anglia, North Wales, Devon & Somerset, and the southern Welsh Marches. There are plenty of retirees in these localities, so go on, have a go!

Go to **www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk** or Woodland Trust, Grantham, NG31 6LL for further information. Just a look at this site will get you enthused!

Fred Hits the 'Ton'.....

Fred Beasley, who was a forestry student in the Dean School in 1929, reached the magic century on the 5th of November. Pete Ralph and Bart Venner drove to Oakhampton to pass on the good wishes from all the attendees at the Dean reunion on 13th October at the Speech House Hotel. The most notable thing about Fred is that he is insured to drive his car – and

still does. Anyone need the name of a good broker?



merry christmas
to all our readers



The Forestry Commission's Dublin Bothy in the 1950's

By John Keenleyside

Part 4: Closure

The Head Forester told us that the bothy would be closed, and claimed that he had no say in this decision. He said the Assistant Conservator would inspect the premises, meet the inmates and outline the procedures for the dispersal of the bodies concerned.

One live-wire in the hostel commandeered my portable typewriter and made out a fictitious supper menu for the week. It included items such as steak, fresh poached salmon, and strawberries and cream. These were all items which had never been seen on the premises. When the Assistant Conservator came to inspect the bothy he read the menu on the wall, and was so out of touch with the reality of bothy life that he thought it was genuine. He said to Wattie that he had been feeding us very well and that there was a vacancy for a cook in the bothy at Fort Augustus for which he would recommend him. Thus Wattie moved very quickly to this elevated position.

Fort Augustus was a large forest with men on the hill, in the forest, in the nursery, on the roads and in the Research outstation, so there was plenty of work. Some of Wattie's mates from Dublin followed him to this new location.

Meanwhile, back at Dublin, a forestry worker on Ardross Forest was appointed cook pro temp, so numbers plummeted. This man, who originated from Orkney, said he was kept very busy cooking for the few that remained. When I queried this further he said that it took a long time cleaning the pans, because Wattie only cleaned one when needed. I showed my disbelief, so he showed me the pan storage room. It contained lots of pans on racks, with green mould lifting off the lids. He said he was getting them cleaned for the sale.

The bright wit who had concocted the supper menu took the law into his own hands again, and produced a list of items for sale in humorous fashion. These included the following:

- one ex-army cooking stove, suitable for the owner of a small colliery;
- the entire stock of pine logs, to be sold by the gallon; and
- an extensive set of pans with self-raising lids, etc, etc.

Numbers dropped to three. The local Assistant Forester, H.R.Reid, and his wife took pity on me and offered me accommodation at Fox Farm, so that solved my personal problem. I was forever grateful to them for the hospitality they offered me. The other two departed to unknown

destinations. The pro temp cook departed for his native Orkney Island. The building became a store for fencing wire and rabbit netting. To my knowledge it was never used again for human habitation. On the site now there is a hamlet of modern houses between the original housing and the church at the side of the main road.

Ardross Forest has long since ceased to be a forest unit in its own right. All that remains are the trees growing steadily and waiting for the inevitable day when a giant harvesting machine will gobble them up.

Later on I did get some feedback on Wattie's success at Fort Augustus. He had managed to cut the weekly budget by half, and introduced them to the delicacy of his home-made scones, both of which had gone down successfully.

So that is the end of the story of the Dublin Bothy, which almost 50 years later is still clear in my mind.

Post Script

In part three I mentioned the power lines marching up the glen in the 1950s. Today the situation is completely different. Beyond Ardross there are many wind turbines supplying power to Easter Ross, and the area has changed from being a net consumer of electricity to being a supplier. Ardross community has also benefited. After the War it had an old Nissen hut for a community centre. Later, in the 1960s, funds were raised for a new hall. Now, however, with the help of money from the Lottery and the power generating company, a new eco-friendly hall has been opened for the 21st century.

Saw Horse Update

by Martin Fletcher

In the December 2006 edition of FCA Today I requested information about crosscut saw-sharpening horses, and I would like to give an update.

Tools For Self Reliance (TFSR) in Southampton was very grateful for the response from former Commission staff. An initial reply from Bill Rayner in Scotland supplied Sandvik designs and dimensions from a 1958 catalogue. Brian Stanger from North Scotland located some photographs, and Fred Courtier thought he might have one in his veritable collection of forestry ephemera at Denny Lodge in the New Forest.

Ironically, a casual meeting with Bob Kemp here in Brockenhurst revealed that he was instrumental in the introduction of these useful saw horses from Sweden when he was in Training Branch.

Further to that, Chris Morling of New Forest Recreation Section recalled seeing one when recently a shed was about to be demolished in the New Forest. He located it just before it was consigned to a bonfire, and delivered it to TFSR. I shall use it when sharpening cross-cut saws for Africa. Subsequently two further saw horses have been 'unearthed' in the New Forest. Many thanks to readers for their responses.

It's very rewarding to see a successful outcome to requests for information. Commission staff, both past and present, have a wealth of knowledge and experience, and there is always someone who has an answer. Ed.

Movers and Shakers in North Scotland

Ron Marnie has come up with this great archival photo taken in the 1960s of some of the North Scotland stalwarts. See whether you can identify some or all. Answers below.



From left to right: Ron Marnie, Alan Ray, Jack Chrystall, Fred Macallan, Jack Macrae, Callum Nicholson, John Drummond, Bob Innes, Ian Grant.
Dickson, Sandy Morrison, George Taylor, Alan Mackay, John Ogilvie, Finlay Macrae, Callum

Memories of a Land Agent

by Richard Illingworth

Richard, who became Principal Land Agent, has now retired to Edinburgh.

An all-seeing DG

I joined the Commission in 1957 and was posted as District Land Agent to Cowal in Argyll. Not long afterwards we had an official visit by the then DG, Sir Arthur Gosling. At that time many of the Commission's houses needed major attention, and among their numbers were Castle Cottages. These were well off the beaten track and were little better than a slum. Sir Arthur caused me great alarm by asking after them, and I remember thinking that if he knew about Castle Cottages, he must be all-seeing. It was only later that I was told that he had once been the local District Officer.

A Torpedoed Digger

For many years the Admiralty ran a torpedo testing station at the head of Loch Long, along the shores of which was Ardgartan Forest. I remember a story, which may be apocryphal, that a Commission digger extracting gravel in shallow water on the shores of the loch had been hit by an unarmed torpedo which had gone off course. If the story is true, the accident report must have been treated with great scepticism!

Official Travel

My district included the Isle of Arran, visits to which usually involved two car ferries and an overnight stay. If my duties there were lighter I used to make a day trip on the paddle steamers which ran during the summer months and allowed an afternoon on the island. I vividly remember the magnificent views, the holiday atmosphere, the crowds of happy day-trippers and the groups of musicians who used to entertain them. The services were withdrawn in the 1960s, and little did I realise then that I was experiencing something which is now social history.

I was based at Aberfoyle in the mid-1960s, and for some time was responsible for estate work within Lorne Forest District. I used to go up by car for longer visits, but once a month would go up by train. This involved getting up early and driving to Callander Station, into which would trundle a venerable locomotive pulling ancient carriages with musty moquette seats and windows which let down with a leather strap.

At Connel Ferry I would have an enormous cooked breakfast at that icon of old-fashioned West Coast hospitality, the Falls of Lora Hotel. After a day with the local clerk of works, I would call at the hotel for a late afternoon tea, and then sleep all the way back to Callander. The line was later closed and the Commission bought the railway track, which has served for many years as a forest road and as access to the Strathgry Forest Cabins.

The Commission's property included a vast area on the shores of Loch Etive, on which

stood an uninhabited cottage. The nearest road was miles away, and the quickest way of inspecting it was by the mail boat, a small, open craft which ran up and down the loch every day. I duly boarded it near Taynuilt, was dropped off on the beach near the cottage, and was picked up on the homeward run.

Wild Cattle in the Forest

This story is quite true. Ardgartan Forest included a large peninsula between Loch Long and Loch Goil, where the plantations were at thicket stage in the late 1950s. Some cattle escaped from a local farm and went native, and for some years lived as a feral herd in the forest. On occasions they terrorised forest workers sent in to do drains maintenance and the like. The beasts were eventually shot, but not without great difficulty.

Carpet as a Status Symbol

In the old days, floor coverings in Commission offices were provided by the Ministry of Works according to inflexible rules which were based on rank. When I was posted to HQ at Basingstoke, I shared an office with Jack Lax, an HEO, and I was entitled to carpet and he wasn't. The Ministry of Works team duly arrived and insisted that the carpet was laid on my side of the rather long and narrow office, leaving his side bare. Once they had left, I did the decent thing and we rearranged it centrally.

Some of the Commission's acquisitions included a mansion house in which furniture and other items had been left behind. A very large and rather fine carpet reputedly found its way from one of these to the Conservator's room at the West Scotland Conservancy offices in Renfrew Street, Glasgow. In those days, civil servants were well used to gauging rank by the size of one's office carpet, and a visiting Sir Humphrey is said to have almost fallen on his knees when ushered into the room concerned.

Counting Sheep

The Commission used to own many hill farms on which the acclimatised sheep flock went with the tenancy. When there was a change of tenancy, the flock was transferred from outgoing to incoming tenants. This involved a 'delivery', a sheep count by representatives of the outgoer and the incomer, which was treated as a social event by local farmers. It was tradition for hospitality to be provided by the landlord, and the Commission auditors took some convincing that the bill for whisky and supper for the many 'helpers' had been properly incurred.

There's my "THE"

Those who have worked at HQ will be well aware of the lengthy process of writing submissions or answering MPs' questions. A first draft would be prepared and would then go up the line and be amended, counter-amended and amended yet again. I remember Andrew Bearhop reading the final version of a document on which he had expended much blood, sweat and tears. He pointed at a word and proudly exclaimed: "That's my 'the'!"

A Christmas Box

While I was at Aberfoyle, I sold a small coal pit

to a contractor. Many months later, I was visited by his son, who told me that he had brought me 'my Christmas' – a bottle each of whisky, brandy and sherry, which it seemed churlish to refuse. Money was tight at the time and I must admit that I was sorely tempted, but eventually I satisfied my conscience by donating the bottles as raffle prizes at the local Commission Christmas social.

Colour Blindness

While in Cowal I had a rush of blood to the head and selected a range of colours for external painting in place of the hitherto standard green. Particularly garish was a yellow ochre on a house near Arrochar. My future father-in-law used to pass that way regularly and always asked: "Who was the silly 'B' who chose that ghastly colour?" Several years later he met the guilty party – me!

I remember giving the tenants of one isolated forest village a choice of colours for their front doors. This was not to the liking of Dame Sylvia Crowe, who preferred a unified approach. I often thought that this typified thinking at the time, when these villages were seen as artefacts in a landscape rather than as people's homes.

Commission Offices

The nicest office I ever had was in Aberystwyth, where the Conservancy Office was on the promenade. My room was on the ground floor, and in the summer months it was delightful to open the window to let in the sea breezes and work to the sound of the waves on the shingle beach. The building had once been an hotel in which, I discovered, my father and mother had spent the first week of their honeymoon. It would be nice to say that I was conceived in a Forestry Commission office, but in fact I was born a year later. It came as something of a culture shock when I was transferred to HQ in Edinburgh, with its sealed windows and temperamental air-conditioning system!

Lodgings

I was a bachelor when I joined the Commission in Cowal. It was relatively easy to get 'digs' during the winter months, but one was thrown out to make way for summer visitors. I didn't last long in my first lodgings, because I was unable to join in the debate about the relative merits of two of the numerous break-away churches of the Church of Scotland.

In my four years in Cowal I lived in at least four different lodgings, a caravan and a self-catering flat. The latter was regarded as being rather infra dig in those far-off days; 'bothying' was not for professional officers. I ended up in a very comfortable large house where I moved into a shed in the garden for the summer.

When the American Polaris depot ship arrived in the Holy Loch in the early 1960s, my fellow residents included several sailors' wives. They and their husbands were addicted to poker, which was played for high stakes on board ship, but for only pennies in our digs.

OBITUARIES

In the previous issue there was a very short obituary for **JIM MAXTONE**. Ron Marnie, who knew him well, felt there was more to say, and offered the following:

I knew and worked with Jim for about 20 years, and enjoyed it immensely. I never knew a more conscientious man, and he was fully dedicated to the Commission.

His work for private woodlands was always done with the greatest care and in the interests of both the client and the Commission. He was tough with his inspections, and consequently the standard of plantings by the estates was high. The factors all respected him, no slipshod work got past him, and his record keeping was immaculate.

He was one of the straightest men I knew, even carrying himself straight, a follow-over from his time in the Guards. I continued to see him once or twice a year after we both retired to enjoy an hour or so of delightful reminiscing on the "good old days". He never really got over the change from grant inspections to trusting the client, which he felt made a bit of a nonsense of his inspection standards.

He was a kindly man whom I shall miss on my return visits to Scotland.

Eifion Jones recalls **JIM HAMILTON**, who died one day short of his 80th birthday.

Jim was born and brought up within the beautiful Dyfi Valley, where the Forestry Commission was active from the early 1920s. On leaving school, Jim followed his father's footsteps and took up employment with the Commission at Aberangell.

During a two-year period of National Service, Jim served most of his time in Germany. This was followed by two years of training at Gwydyr Forestry School, from where he graduated in the early 1950s.

As his career progressed, a number of postings took Jim, Margaret and their two daughters to several forests in north and mid Wales. His ability as a forester was acknowledged by his senior officers, and following rapid promotion to Chief Forester, he took charge of the prestigious Coed y Brenin Forest. Coed y Brenin was at the forefront of promoting forest recreation, in addition to an extensive programme of new planting and harvesting.

Jim was a most charismatic forest officer whose enthusiasm for his profession in turn enthused his staff at all levels. He regularly gave praise and encouragement to his staff by trusting them with duties which drew out the best in each.

Jim retired in 1987 from the post of District Manager over the forest area within which he was born and bred.

He was a keen fisherman and a capable photographer, and will have left his family with a library of photographic memories of their walk through life together.

In addition to the pleasure of his family, Jim took an active part in village life and became an elder of his Chapel, where his devotion to its management was well praised by other members.

Jim was one of the founder members of the FCA Association in the North Wales Group, whose functions both he and Margaret regularly attended and enjoyed.

I had the pleasure of working for seven years with Jim at Coed y Brenin, during which time I

grew to know him well as a senior officer, a neighbour and a good friend.

Peter Webb remembers **RICHARD (DICK) GRENFELL**, who died in Cornwall aged 83.

Dick was a member of a well known West Country family, and spent most of his career in Devon and Cornwall. He attended FTS after the War, having served in Italy, where he was badly wounded. He was a big man with a big personality and will be missed by his many friends, and particularly by his wife Dolly.

Alastair Rowan writes that **JOHN DRUMMOND's** many friends will be saddened by his sudden death last month at his home in Dumfries.

A native of Aberdeenshire and a graduate of Aberdeen University, he was one of the band of "Temporary Travelling Surveyors" who worked under the leadership of the mensuration officer for Scotland, Alec MacKenzie, on the 1947-49 census of woodlands.

I met up with John and Bob Ross in Cowal in the autumn of 1948. We had the luxury of a Ford saloon to get around, but there was still a great deal of walking, as Alec MacKenzie recalled in his poem on the census:

"And we counted the million acres we gleaned 'gainst the wearisome miles that we trod".

At the start of 1950 the Commission took over timber licensing from the Board of Trade. Four temporary district officers were appointed on the strength of this, and John went first to Tavistock in SW(E), then Fort Augustus in N(S).

John's career took a different direction in 1964, as the Fort William pulp and paper mill came on stream. Stan Forrester had demonstrated the potential of the Isachsen III double-drum winch for extraction on steep hills, and John Dickson drew all the right conclusions as to machine numbers required, consequent road building, and the need to train increased numbers of logging operatives. So the Scottish Pulp Training Team was set up, consisting of John Drummond and Tony Morris.

Especially valuable were the improvements in winch technique that John developed, particularly the "skyline", which increased possible extraction distances from 150 to 300+ metres. It was easier to train skyline operators, and it reduced the roading requirements dramatically. John's work on cable-crane development took him to Ivar Samset's establishment in Norway to work with radio-controlled cranes, and to British Columbia. He also undertook an assignment in Jamaica, which turned out to be highly dangerous.

John met and married Betty MacArthur at Knapdale, where she worked in the forest office. John became a member of the Work Study Team at Kilmun, and they later moved to Dumfries in 1973, when John joined the Work Study establishment at Ae. He served there until his retirement in 1987.

John's interests were varied; they included fishing, models of all sorts, and especially cars. His E-type Jaguar was one that his friends particularly remember, although it was perhaps not best suited to forest roads.

His wide experience and his great practical flair made him an exceptional trainer, while his quiet warmth and humour made him splendid company, a valued colleague and a good friend.

Letters to the Editor



Dear Richard,

In the last issue Ken Trodd, in his obituary to Warwick Payne, referred to a book entitled "Tim of Tamberley Forest", which largely figured Warwick. You suggested that "there had to be a good story behind this enigma".

With the help of a member of the staff of the Forest Research library at Alice Holt, a search of the web was made and the following discovered.

"Tim of Tamberly" (note different spelling) was written by Irenne Byres and published in 1954 by Parish. Ken points out that the author, whom he has met, was a man writing under a female pseudonym. The search also revealed that the author had written other books including "Tim Returns to Tamberly" and "Trouble at Tamberly". The titles of these and other books suggests they were written for children. They were classed as fiction, but fictional characters and people are often based on fact. Authors gather such background information for their novels.

I am tempted to think that "Tamberly" is the author's transliteration of Camberley, a town not far from Bramshill Forest, but this is pure speculation on my part. Yours sincerely, Mike Whitlock

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