

2008 AGM and Tour

A glorious Spring day, bluebells in the Trossachs and the first verdant flush on the birch and larch were all the precursors to a very successful tour of the forests around Aberfoyle.

We arrived at the David Marshall Lodge and were greeted by Russell Lamont from the nearby district office. He accompanied us throughout the day and was a great source of information and inspiration. During coffee he gave us an entertaining and informative introduction to forestry activities in the Trossachs. He explained that it was part of the long established Queen Elizabeth Forest Park, which itself had become part of the recently designated Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park.

With a very large number of visitors, recreation and conservation were considered as important as timber production. He gave us a clear outline of the current organisation within Forest Districts in the Commission, and for most of us this represented a great change from what we remembered in our times. They really have become super districts and, very interestingly, John Zehetmayr recalled that when George Ryle wrote his history of the Commission, he forecast that this would happen.

With all this information buzzing around in our heads, we wanted to go into the forest and see for ourselves. The morning run took us to the Lochard block, where we drove around Lochan Spling, stopping to admire the sculptures tucked away in

surprise and secret locations. They had been produced by a local artist and were part of the more extensive sculptures on the Lochard Family Cycle Trails. The trails had been designed to encourage families to explore the forest and discover the sounds and sights of wildlife.

After a relaxing lunch at the Lodge we returned to the forest to see current Commission harvesting activities. A harvester in action was an impressive sight. A quick cut, down came the tree, the on-board computer checked sizes, and out came long logs destined for BSW at Carlisle and 2m chipwood for Cowie! Just like that! A timber wagon drove up and the 2m chipwood was loaded, but we had to leave before it rolled down the road.

Many of us remarked that this was what forestry was all about. It was considered that these days "Slasher" was almost too embarrassed to refer to timber production in its pages, even with its increasing value. We were all proud to see the timber from the trees, because it represented the return on the investment with which so many of us had been involved.

Our final stop was along Loch Katerine, which the Forestry Commission has acquired on a 150-year lease. We were told that in conjunction with Scottish Water, this was part of a large native woodland project. Native trees would be planted on parts of the area according to the Ecological Site Classification, while the remainder would be allowed to regenerate naturally. Extensive

recreation facilities were planned, which included linking the National Cycle Route with the West Highland Way. The project was also part of the much larger native woodland being developed on east Loch Lomond.

And so the day concluded. John Zehetmayr thanked all who had made our day so successful. He praised the foresight of those involved in current forest planning, but couldn't resist in making a few provocative comments during the day which he said were good for encouraging informed discussion!

The previous evening at the AGM dinner in the Mansion House at the Zoo, we had been entertained by our speaker, James Ogilvie from Silvan House. He recounted his sponsored climb of Mt Everest last year, which was both arduous and enjoyable. He had raised more than £14,000 for Tree Aid. His aim was 50p for every foot of elevation above sea level, and he was almost there. A great achievement and we were proud to be party to it in our support of Tree Aid.

Join us – NOW!

By Bart Venner, Chair, FCA

Do you like going out to gardens, stately homes and castles, or are you more of a pub lunch type?

Maybe you enjoy trips to a good show, or perhaps only a day out at Christmas to have a meal somewhere with a convivial atmosphere. What about going to a barbeque or a wine and cheese evening or a quiz night? Need I go on? Have you joined your local Forestry Commission Association group?

These are the activities members enjoy,

and always in the company of friends and colleagues. Some groups meet frequently, and others only occasionally, but it's a great time to catch up with folks and see what they are doing in retirement. You would be surprised what we get up to with more time to do those things that work in the Forestry Commission hindered.

We are all ex-members of "The Commission", or partners or spouses of ex-members. Come along to enjoy some company. Nothing strenuous, nothing expensive, just a good time! Tomorrow's life starts today! Contact your local or nearest representative now - you'll see the list on the back page.

Ode To A Tree (of Doubtful Species)

A parody of Psalm 11

The Lord is my forester,
He plants me in pleasant places
Where there is depth of soil and moisture
And plenty of food to nourish me,
But also in barren, stony places
Where there is little depth of soil,
Even in soft peaty places
Where the harsh winds blow.
I struggle to survive and grow
But the Lord looks after me.
Wherever I am planted
I may grow strong and tall,
But, on the other hand, my growth may be
Slow and I may be bowed by the wind,
Even blown over.
But the time of harvest will come
And whether tall and well grown
Or slow grown and small,
I shall be gathered to the great timber
yard on high.

Kime Lochtwik (an anagram, for fear of celestial repercussions!)

Hazards to Wildlife in Highland Forests in the '50s and '60s - Part 2

By David Paterson

Controlling red deer in the forest at Rannoch was a testing experience, and to improve efficiency we tried night shooting by spotlight. This gave you an exhilarating feeling of being on a pick-up truck on a Texas turkey shoot.

It was also a great education on the teeming nightlife, and how to differentiate between the eye reflections of red deer, roe deer and foxes. The procedure upset some neighbouring parties as unfair sportsmanship and was stopped. Then it was suggested that in October we should conduct a trial of letting off tapes of stags recorded during the rut to draw them out of the forest cover and on to the ranger's rifle in a clearing. The tape player was duly set down in a gap in the plantation and switched on. Unbeknown to us, a stag was within yards and came charging out straight for the ranger and tape recorder. The ranger took off at Olympic speed, leaving the stag to maul the tape player and puzzle over the source of the challenge. At a touch of a button, it had become difficult to sell this technique to rangers.

Wildlife lesson: Test new techniques well before putting into practice!

While I was in Ross-shire about 1960, I employed a Polish contractor to plant at Slattadale Forest. He became very agitated because his work was torn out every night. We suspected deer swimming across from the islands in Loch Maree, and sent across a skilled marksman, who shot out nine roe and two red deer. However, the damage continued, and the contractor became more agitated than ever. Finally, wild goats from the Tollie herd were identified as responsible. Several were shot to discourage the habit, but this created a problem in completing the pest control return: we were not supposed to shoot wild goats, so they became "roe deer"!

Wildlife lesson: Don't believe all you read in wildlife returns!

As pine martens began to colonise the older plantations, they were sometimes accidentally caught in fox traps. This came from an agreement with the Blackface Breeders' Association which led to fox control being undertaken by trappers as a seasonal responsibility. As a result of this co-operation with hill sheep farmers, I can recall pine marten casualties at Strathconon and Lael Forests which, sadly, were never recorded. These actions probably delayed the colonisation of the new forest habitats which we had created. The real problem was that subsidies for sheep rearing on

unimproved hill land led to crude practices and poor lambing performance, and foxes were blamed.

Wildlife lesson: White, four-legged woolly "terrorists" are behind many ecological issues!

Sometimes there was no need for ammunition to make a difference to red deer numbers. After a local winter storm in Badenoch in 1957, I had the opportunity to visit Ardverikie Estate for a felling licence inspection. It is now widely known as the location for filming the TV comedy series and parody of a Highland estate, "Monarch of the Glen" and, in this case, it was an appropriate title.

After checking the extensive windthrow near the Lodge, I made a sweep through the mid-slopes to assess the windthrow there. I became aware that dead and dying red deer were lying through the old plantation in remarkably high numbers, apparently from grass sickness. These included some stags with very fine heads, having lived under forest cover. It was a strange experience to stand beside the prone animals breathing their last.

Wildlife lesson: Wait until "royals" die before you stand beside them

I used every excuse to visit native pinewoods in my districts, and set off once to inspect a licence application at Shildaig, owned by Lord Lovelace.

While walking above a rocky defile near an estate track, I was suddenly and unceremoniously thrown to the ground by someone with a rifle. I did not take kindly to this unexpected assault, especially as the ground was wet and rock-strewn. However you realise that the man with a gun has the advantage. He made it clear I was not to speak and lie perfectly still. Shortly afterwards a group of deer, including a moderate-sized stag, came through the defile and I waited for my assailant to fire. He did not do so until the stag finally gathered itself to jump over an old stock fence bordering the track. Thereupon it leapt, was shot, and fell dead on the roadway. An unseen Landrover driven by the estate stalker immediately started up and in two minutes the stag was into the back of the vehicle. It was the fastest ambush and recovery of a carcass I had ever seen! At that point my assailant, Lord Lovelace, introduced himself. He nearly did not get his licence that day!

Wildlife lesson: If there are no natural predators, beware of Lords!

Golden eagles were occasionally sighted in Sutherland, and I recall one absorbing incident where an eagle was swooping repeatedly over an ailing lamb on the bare hillside as I wandered through Coulin native pinewood near Kinlochewe. On another occasion north of Loch Shin, with snow falling lightly in the dark days of late October, an eagle patrolled above me as I staggered alone over the rough slippery ground in a young plantation of the Reay Estate. The previous day the estate forester had died suddenly of a heart attack beside me in a high remote plantation. We carried no radios then, so I had to leave him on the hillside while I sought help from the nearest shooting lodge several miles away. It took two hours before estate workers and the doctor from Scourie reached the site. I was filling in time to be interviewed by the police constable but I became haunted by the thought that the eagle was watching me for a reason as it passed over and over again - had it been denied its prey the day before and come a second time for me?

Wildlife lesson: Wait for the police constable in the hotel bar, and think how interesting it will be when we have lynx and wolves and bears as well!

A Health & Safety Eager Beaver

By Les Howe

The place was Wareham Nursery and the time about 1970.

Every year in the summer since about 1948 we used to make compost for the following season. This involved collecting spent hops from the local brewery and cutting mature bracken. The bracken was chaffed and mixed with the spent hops, and heaps were made in sheds. The heaps were watered and turned during the next few months, and eventually produced a superb compost for the nursery experiments.

To chaff the bracken we dragged out a vicious piece of iron work called a chaff cutter, which consisted of a large wheel containing four cutting blades. This was bolted to a concrete path and belt driven from a secured Lister engine.

This operation involved all the nursery staff, usually about a dozen men and women, each with a special job. The work went on at a fair old pace and was enjoyable for all concerned.

Jean and Topsy began the operation by undoing the stooks of bracken. They passed them to Harry on the chaff cutter, which was chugging away, driven by the Lister. Harry placed the bundles of bracken on the bench and pushed them into the whirring blades. The bundles dropped to the ground neatly chopped into small pieces. Gladys and Ivor raked the chaffed bracken from under the machine, being careful not to become

entangled in the belt drive. They passed the bracken to Ron and Jack, who mixed the spent hops and bracken in the correct proportions, then they passed the mixture to Bill and Viv, who built the heaps.

The whole operation went like clockwork and the gang worked happily together. They stopped every hour to give the Lister a chance to cool down and be checked by Cecil. This also gave Ken an opportunity to hone the blades. By now the team was very thirsty, so Maggie and Sheila, who kept an eye on office procedures, had the kettle ready boiled for a tea break.

However, on this particular day, Ken lost concentration and his hand came into contact with the blade, resulting in a nasty cut. He was whipped away to hospital and was off work for a few weeks.

Some time later a man arrived from the Health & Safety, complete with his clipboard, and questioned me about Ken's accident. Naturally I co-operated and explained the operation over a cup of tea. The man from the H&S said, "This I must see". We dragged out our vicious chaff cutter and he said "What the hell's that?", or words to that effect.

By now he was writing away furiously on his clipboard, and I had a feeling that all wasn't going too well. We then set up the whole working operation, and he really had a field day! He produced a set of guidelines which, amongst other things, required a guard on the cutter and the Lister to be covered, but there was very much more.

Of course the man from the H&S was correct in following up Ken's accident, and correct in pulling our operation to pieces. We had been doing the same old thing for years. Whoops! He returned at a later date and passed our operation as satisfactory and safe. However, the operation which we had been doing for years has now passed into history.

Are there any more stories of this iconic device? It would be great if we could see the famous machine in action. Does anyone have a photo? Ed.

From the Editor



At our recent AGM, members requested that our newsletter should include snippets of current information about our activities, lives and events. This would be a good way of letting each other know what was going on. I agreed, but it depends on your contributions: you'll get what you send me. I don't think it's worth advertising forthcoming events unless you give plenty of advance notice – because the newsletter is published only three times a year, an announcement might miss the event. So let's try it. Send in your "Snippets".

A Prisoner's Forestry Storey

By Hermann Dunkel

At the start of World War 2 I was 14 and living on the family farm near Osnabruck in northwest Germany. I joined the German Navy when I reached 18 in 1943, and was sent to Hamburg for six weeks' basic training before being posted to Danzig (Gdansk) on submarines.

However, there were very few there because they had either been sunk or they could not be built quickly enough. I was worried that I might be posted to the Russian Front, which we had heard was horrific, but I was posted to France, and on arrival I was told to report to the naval batteries at Boulogne, overlooking the Channel.

When the Allied invasion took place in May 1944 I was part of the German naval defending force. After some weeks we were overrun and I was taken prisoner in September 1944. That was the end of the war for me. I didn't mind too much because I didn't enjoy the fighting. I was placed in a PoW camp at Dieppe for about a month and a half awaiting transhipment to Britain with the other prisoners.

My next move was by boat to England. We arrived at Southampton in November and were taken by train to a PoW camp at Colchester. Over winter and spring we worked on the land raising and cleaning sugar beet. It was hard going, but we were outside and keeping fit. We had adequate food and as prisoners, and reasonable facilities.

In spring 1945, some representatives of the PoW service in Scotland came to Colchester to ask for volunteers to go there to do general agricultural work. I took the chance because I was used to such work on the family farm. I was taken to a PoW transit camp on the Douglas Water in South Lanarkshire, and then transferred to a permanent PoW camp at Carronbridge, near Dumfries.

Although I had volunteered for agricultural, I and others were immediately put on tree planting and other forestry work. Each day we were collected by lorry and driven to the planting sites near Moniaive. When the planting season was over we returned to general agricultural work in the Thornhill area.

The PoW camp was like being in army barracks, and very much better than being at the front. We had regular meals and were provided with good tools and equipment. I was also able to keep a dog, a Pomeranian. I did try to escape once because I was feeling homesick and wanted to see my family. I left the farm in the afternoon and walked away down the road. I slept under a haystack that night, but was caught pretty soon on the next day by the local

policeman. He said that I would have to be handcuffed, but I said I didn't want it. So he said he would have to walk me back. My punishment was 28 days in the Calaboose, so I decided not to try that again. So that's where I was when the war ended in May 1945.

We were now classified as civilians and free to come and go. My first luxury was to go to a shop and buy a suit. At last I was really a civilian! I and many others stayed on in the Carronbridge camp working on the land, but now we were paid – 50 shillings a week. I felt rich! I even bought a 500cc BSA motorbike for my leisure trips.

In December 1949 I took the offer of a free passage to Germany and returned to my family near Osnabruck. However, all had changed. My father had died on the Eastern Front, where casualties had been enormous. My mother and brother and two sisters had tried to run the farm, but failed, and had sold it before I returned. I only stayed for four weeks, and hankered after Scotland.

I was offered a free return trip to the UK because there was a great shortage of agricultural workers and a need to increase food production. So back I came in January 1950 and went to stay and work on a farm at Auldgrith near Dumfries. I continued doing general agricultural work and eventually in 1952 met Peggy, my wife to be, at a party in a friend's house near Dumfries.

I had many changes of job because I wanted to gain more experience. I became a keeper on a grouse moor on Sir Alec Douglas-Home's estate at Douglas Water. We lived in a lodge between Hyndford Bridge and Riggside. Later I went keepkeeping on a number of other estates in the Lanarkshire area and on the Delvine estate near Blairgowrie. I finished my working life on Lord Roseberry's Malleny estate just outside Edinburgh, where we stayed at Balerno.

We now have a family, with grandchildren, in Scotland, and we and our Scottish family still keep in regular contact with my other family at Osnabruck in Germany.

(Peggy and Hermann now live in Livingston, and I drive them to the RNIB club each week at Bathgate. That's how I know their story. Does anyone recall the trees being planted by prisoners near Moniaive in 1945? They must be huge by now. Hermann cannot remember whether he was planting on private or Commission land, but he would like to know more about them. Ed.)



OBITUARIES

BERNARD BEARD's son-in-law told me that he died in May, aged 88.

Following his return from wartime service, for which he was made MBE, Bernard joined the Commission as a foreman after completing training at Thetford FTS.

Initially he was posted to Pickering. After inspecting the house he was allocated and finding it unfit for habitation, and being a young married man with a wife and two young children, he declined the posting!

He was re-posted to Wigsley Wood at Coddington, where there was no house, only bundles of dressed timber on the site. This had been donated by the Canadian Government for the construction of six prefabricated cedar wood houses. Bernard had to organise the labour for the construction of these houses, and in effect built his own.

Two years later he was sent to take charge at Amptill, which included the nursery. Bernard and his family were hosts to many foreign students who came to England for forestry training, and a number of those students and their families have stayed in contact to the present day.

His next posting was Thetford, and later he was appointed head forester at Wendover in the Chilterns. There, he planned and promoted a wide range of recreation facilities, and was also responsible for private woodlands. On retirement he acted as consultant to a number of large estates.

Bernard was a true gentleman and leaves two daughters, Susan and Anne, four grandchildren and twelve great-grandchildren. Sadly, his wife Joan died in February this year, just six weeks before their 65th wedding anniversary.

Peter Webb joined a large congregation at the funeral of **RAY BRAINE**, who died in late April, just before his 80th birthday.

Ray had been the chairman and his wife Audrey the secretary of the FCA's West Country group for many years.

Ray was born near Newbury in Hampshire. He attended Benmore FTS, and after training he went to the West Country. There he spent his whole career, starting at Savernake, moving on to Wilsey Down, Wareham and Dartmoor, and finally as Chief Forester at Halwill.

He also served the community well as a Parochial Parish Councillor and a District Councillor for Pyworthy in Devon for many years.

Jamie Scott remembers **IAN CAMPBELL**, who died recently.

I knew Ian first at Breadalbane Academy and as a resident of the Boys' Hostel in Aberfeldy. After school he started work at Drummond Hill Forest, but in 1943 joined the Royal Navy and served on HMS Woolwich, a submarine depot ship, in Ceylon, Burma and India.

In 1948 he returned to Drummond Hill, but soon attended FTS at Peebles, after which he went on to sample plot work, based at Edinburgh. In 1960 he transferred to West Scotland to work on planning and economics, based in Argyll. In 1964 he took over Achray Forest, followed by service at Creran, Fearnoch and Raera.

He had a wide range of interests, including gardening, bee and poultry keeping, archaeology and country dancing. He held posts at some time or other in most local organisations, and was session clerk at his church in Taynuilt for 30 years. He was well liked and highly respected by all, he had a ready smile and could always tell a good story, even if it took some time!

Readers will be interested to know that his son, Andrew, followed in his footsteps to become a forester in North Scotland before joining the John Muir Trust.

Rod Pimm writes of **D'ARCY BLACK**, whom he first met at Faskally FTS in 1959. D'arcey was one of my three instructors, alongside Norman Tulloch, the Principal, Sandy Cram and Iain Garioch.

He was the son of a gamekeeper in Aberdeenshire and lived with his family for many in the Huntly area, then latterly on Cawdor, where his grandfather became head keeper.

He started with the Commission in 1940 as a trainee forester, but was called up during the war and had a most eventful five years in the Royal Air Force, finishing up in India and Singapore. There he was struck down with malaria, but recovered and was promptly sent for a year to help with reconstruction at Hiroshima.

He resumed his forestry career in 1946, completing

his training at Glentress FTS. He was then posted to Laiken, the Black Isle, Lochcarron, Aberfoyle, Drymen and Glenbranter, where he was promoted to chief forester, and finally to Dunkeld. He also had a period in between as instructor at Faskally. During his time at Drymen he was responsible for the Cashel caravan and camp site – one of the pioneer such sites and hugely popular with Glasgow folk.

I remember D'arcey as hard but fair in all his dealings, and I am certain that and I and many others owe him considerably for his part in our training. At Glenbranter it is said that newly appointed foresters quaked at the high standards and output he demanded! However, his sense of humour was never far away.

On retirement he carried out various private consultancy tasks, some linked to health and safety and others with sawmills and quality control. Even without that, he was never bored. He had his fishing, his garden, the work he did for the church in Dunkeld, and the numerous people whom he helped in so many different ways. A good member of the community. A fine man whom I am privileged to have known.

Dennis Harrison and Peter Noot recall **TONY FORD**, who died at home in Stamford, aged 70 from a progressive neurological illness.

Tony's career in forestry started in Dorset as a forest worker. He then entered Gwydyr Forestry School in 1959, where he started late because of an injury from an accident on his Vincent 1000 motorbike. His first forester post was at the Pembrey Forest in West Wales.

In 1965 he joined Dennis Harrison on soil survey work throughout England and Wales. Between them they completed soil and wind-throw maps of most of the Welsh forests. In conjunction with Graham Pyatt they contributed to the "Guide to Site Types in Mid and North Wales".

During that time Tony continued his love affair with motoring, enjoying a series of fast cars until family responsibilities changed his priorities. He started his married life with Sandra in Bryncoch, South Wales in 1971 and his first daughter, Joanna, was born there. That year he resigned from the Commission to take up the challenge of implementing the landscape plan for Rutland Water.

Over the following years he was involved in many innovative landscape schemes with the water authorities. He had four daughters: Joanna, Sarah, Anna-Marie, and Beth, so his family life was busy. He followed his daughters' careers with great pride, and in spite of the severe limitations imposed by his illness he attended the weddings of Joanna and Anna-Marie, which gave him much pleasure.

Roger Hay knew **CHARLES MACMAHON** well.

Charles was born and educated in Dingwall and served with the Royal Engineers in Germany. He joined the Commission in North Scotland as an area engineer, and following the appointment of Eric MacMillan to succeed General Hutson as chief engineer, Charles became directorate engineer for Wales. When the directorates were scrapped he was posted as assistant chief engineer to Basingstoke, where he worked with Eric Macmillan and, later, Eric Granfield.

Following the move from Basingstoke to Edinburgh in 1975, Charles continued in his post as assistant chief engineer (civil). He was keen to exploit the mineral resources available on the Commission's estate, but found the lack of entrepreneurial spirit very frustrating. However, his work did map much of the future road-making material throughout the UK.

On retirement, he continued with his interest in golf, and on the death of his wife he returned to Winchester to be close to his family.

Peter Humphries, a friend and work colleague, remembers **SHIRLEY DAVIS**, who died in December 2007.

Shirley joined me at Ennerdale in the old North West England Conservancy in 1978. She quickly adapted to life in the Forest Office, was helpful and respected by everyone she came in contact with, and always put the needs of others before her own.

I soon found out that her number one priority was her family, closely followed by her dedication to her work. I remember one Christmas when we were selling Christmas trees on a Saturday, when it started to snow heavily. Brian Mahony and I only just managed to get Shirley home in the

Land Rover. On the Monday she phoned to tell me that the lane into her house was completely blocked, but she had been down to the river and she thought she could manage to cross it and walk along the fields into work!

Under the re-organisation Shirley was transferred to Lakes Forest District Office at Bassenthwaite, where she became office manager. She dealt with not only the introduction of the new structure, but also the "trauma" of the introduction of computers, in her usual conscientious and committed manner. I greatly appreciated Shirley's calming influence within the office at that difficult time. Shirley had to deal with one more re-organisation when the office and staff switched to Forestry Authority duties.

Shirley retired in March 1993. Unfortunately, not long after retiring she was diagnosed with breast cancer. She tackled this with her usual courage and recovered, only to be cruelly taken by a stroke. She will be sadly missed by her family and many friends.

Barry Bruce, forester in Kintyre, pays tribute to the late **JOHN STRANG** of Achnabreac.

John was a good friend to us and helped many of us out of sticky situations – breakdowns, boggings and ditchings, as well as affording us storage space for bikes and trailers when the need arose.

He was a quiet, unassuming man of the old order, and many of us would have been left stranded without his aid. I also found him an immense source of historical and local knowledge, which was of immeasurable benefit to me.

His passing represents the end of an era. He was of that brand of indigenous hillmen whose like are fast disappearing from our glens; a man born, bred and moulded in the hills; a man who worked the hills and who fitted his environment.

As many of our old, working rural dwellings fall to holiday, lifestyle and retail homes, John Strang represented the last bastion of an era when the glens were working places. With his passing a little bit more of our Scots heritage fades into history. It is not solely the death of a man; it is the death of a way of life, a culture and a way of seeing the world. I doubt we will ever see his like again.

Whatever happens, one thing remains – to us at least, Achnabreac will always be "John Strang's." It was my privilege to have known him and caught at least a dying breath of that era. Slan leat a'charaid.

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