



Forest Visit 1949 Style

By Archie Cameron

In the late 1940s, West Scotland Conservancy Office organised annual visits to a forest, when we were unchained and led blinking to the bus. The chosen forest would lay on a range of delights for us – horse or mechanical extraction, axe and cross-cut felling, and planting. We lunched alfresco, then had a hotel dinner during our return. On the homeward bus, singing would be led by John Watson, himself a semi-professional performer. Not an I-pod in sight.

On one such outing, some of us suspected that the forest staff had taken us over the worst of ploughed ground, which was a trial for anyone with short legs. One lady slid into a bog, landing in a supine position, and was grateful to find a village shop where she could replace an essential item of her nether garments. I hope she is still with us, but I'll not name her. She endured much ribbing. *Come on – own up Ed.*

Looking back at the Glasgow office in 1949, it seemed almost Victorian in its methods. We still had dip pens, and the most modern piece of equipment was an "Adder-Lister", manually operated by a crank handle and used only by Accounts

Section. Again, when ball pens appeared, only that same section merited them. Incredibly, we rented two separate floors at 53 Bothwell Street and two at 200 St. Vincent Street. It was no joke for the office messenger when a heavy parcel was delivered to the wrong street. Later we moved to West George Street, then Renfrew Street, and finally India Street, where the Conservancy Office expired.

The photo shows us visiting Strathlachlan in 1949 and was taken by Bill Thomson, an accomplished amateur photographer, who is also in it. I wonder how many survivors are out there. *Archie is now 78 and retired to Paisley – Ed.*

Those whom I remember in the photo are: John James (Conservator), Ben Kinnaird (chief clerk), John Williamson (labour officer); Hugh Dyer (A/Cons); Maisie Cullum (CO), Robert Brown (EO), Alec Liddell (EO), John Millar (CO), John McMillan (EO), Barrie Drummond (EO), James Blyth (CO), John Watson (drawing office), Frank Foley (CO), Bill Thomson (DO), Evelyn McMillan (typist), Isobel Boyd (typing superintendent), Rosemary Nicol (cartographer), Bill Griffin (CO), Hugh Brown (CO), Mary Campbell (typist), George Gordon (CO), Jim Gordon (CO) and Archie Cameron (CO).

North Wales Group On The Web

The North Wales Group has produced a web page in conjunction with Forestry Commission Wales.

Its guiding hands were Jeff Evans of Forestry Commission Wales and Les Starling, FCA member. It shows recent activities with photos of the members relaxing and enjoying themselves, and lists future events to encourage participation. The page is also circulated to members of the FCA as a hard copy.

The downside is the fact that only a few of the older members use the internet. However, it is likely that new members will be familiar with it and that more correspondence in the future will be by e-mail.

To see the site, go to...

www.forestry.gov.uk/fcawales

The website is excellent and has plenty of pics showing members having a great time. To quote a Scottish term, "If you don't go, you are missing yourself!" Now that's a challenge for other groups. Ed

Faskally, telling it like it was

By Ted Radford

Although I'm happy to endorse John McNeil's assertion of the camaraderie that existed at Faskally, and indeed at the other FTS, because it made life tolerable during our incarceration, I cannot share his rose-tinted perception of the "training" we received there.

My recollection (and I like to think that my complement of marbles is intact) was that it remained severe whilst John and I were coevals. "Regime" has a connotation of severity, and it is tempting to preface it with "Draconian". On reflection, that's an exaggeration, because Draco enforced his will for what seemed to him were good reasons.

Enforcement of the petty regulations at Faskally was all the more galling because they were mindless abstractions aimed at securing unquestioning conformity. I draw a veil over the abysmal catering, because I've no wish to

relieve the nightmare of the rampant and widespread salmonella it once entailed.

I'm minded to be forgiving of the practical training that was demonstrably cost-free labour on local forests, prolonged way beyond the point at which we became proficient at a specific task. Here I adduce in evidence the chainsaw held by Peter MacDonald, almost out of shot on the left of the picture. No diaphragm carburettor and a dog clutch – even then it was a museum piece! Perhaps it was a mercy that we "future pulp producers" were allowed to fell only one small tree each using it.

I can even excuse the travesty that passed for formal education, because it led to my conviction that it should not be allowed to continue so in my TU & FASTCo roles. I was delighted to be material to its replacement and enhancement by the Newton Rigg and Scottish School of Forestry courses.

I'm well aware of the "de mortuis....." stricture, and respond to the recollections of Faskally not from personal rancour, even though this is merited. I should also record my personal gratitude for the benevolence of some staff members that kept dismissal at bay.

Rather, my aim was to pay due tribute to our friends there, friends who had the courage not to knuckle under. Like them I received the warning letter which John cites, and changed my behaviour to stay (just) within the acceptable bounds, however arbitrarily defined. I'm not proud of that change. Those with the full courage of their convictions were pursued to the point of expulsion with fabricated poor marks, including the notoriously partial "personal assessment". Those of us who survived Faskally and subsequently prospered did so despite its regime, not because of it.

One further correction: not only was the exchange period at Gwydyr more relaxed, the food was much, much better!

That Faskally photograph – again

By Ralph Nickerson

Now that my tears of nostalgia have dried a little, may I warmly commend you and my old colleague John McNeil (JD to his intimates) for printing that lovely picture of would-be foresters from half a century back. Lovely in some eyes, of course, but I have heard the pictured group likened, rather unkindly, to a gang of Eastern European refugees before setting off to cut firewood for their gulag bunkhouse.

Might I just correct the cast list as printed below the snap? In the front row, just to Ian Robinson's left, crouch Mike Smith (who went on to glory in the FC) and Ian Ward (who was sadly later de-selected). In the back row, immediately to Nickerson's left, is "Wee Gordy" Brown (who spoiled his back at work, and retired hurt).

If you will forgive my obvious bias, those two intakes at Faskally comprised some of the finest young men I ever worked, studied and messed with. One or two, to my knowledge, have passed on prematurely to receive their celestial slashers, but I believe the bulk (an appropriate word at our age) are still around.

To pick up a point or two of JD's recollection, that "de-selection" referred to was indeed a nasty fact of life. It was frankly unfair and invidious, and was applied patently "pour encourager les autres". My own Year was reduced from an original 16 to 12, although thereby hangs a tale. One of our number, Dave Chappell, was given his letter of dismissal at our first Easter break – but flatly refused to accept or sign it! So the powers rather bemusedly withdrew their de-selection. David stayed to the end, graduated – and later put in a couple of very effective decades on a southern English estate.

Also missing from JD's brief memoir (perhaps he'll expand on it some day, and do

Faskally proper justice) was any mention of the all-female domestic staff who fed us so healthily (I still love peanut butter...) and whose virtue we would sporadically attempt to despoil. They lived in-house, sequestered at the top of a tower in the forbidden quarter. And in a den at the bottom of this tower, protecting her maidenly subordinates, lurked a dragon whom very few of us rugged youth would care to cross. A flash of her eye was reputed to split a Douglas fir at 30 metres, although this admirable lady's other reputed attributes need not be repeated here.

Nor will I dwell upon the amazingly diverse qualities and virtues of our four instructors (by my time, D'arcy B, of fearsome repute, had been replaced by a short gentleman called Stoddart) except to say that good old Sandy Cram last year had the dreadful misfortune to be run down, with Jeannie, on a pavement in Banchory. He has apparently not yet recovered, and would positively welcome any messages from his many former proteges. He certainly deserves our warmest good wishes.

Finally, it occurred to me that, since the year 2011 will mark the round half-century since my seniors first dragged their hobnails across Faskally's stone portals, a reunion might then be desirable, somewhere in Pitlochry. I would certainly make the effort, if still around and mobile. I'm sure our elders' Seniors and our own Juniors, making four intakes in all, would also be very welcome.

If any Faskally inmates of around 50 years ago think a reunion is a good idea, I can act as a central contact putting you all in touch.

Ralph's address and e-mail is below. Ed

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Spent Hops

By Martin Fletcher

The H & S Eager Beaver article in the August FCA Today reminded me of working at Kennington Nursery, just south of Oxford in 1966, before going to the Dean FTS.

This was a small research nursery, opened in 1926 and run for most of its life by the redoubtable H/F Bill Gray until it closed in the late 60s.

No chaff cutter here, but there was the weekly expedition on Wednesdays to collect the spent hops from Morrell's Brewery, near Oxford Station, two miles from the nursery. Two of us had to go with the Ferguson tractor and trailer, and there weren't many volunteers from the nursery ladies! Being the 'boy', I rode in the trailer, standing on the tow bar, a practice which by then was strictly forbidden in the Commission. This was fine on the way up, but not so cosy amongst the steaming spent hops on the way back.

However, the bonus was being given a bottle of Forest Brown Ale at the brewery. Perhaps this should have been declared on some Commission form as a 'gift in kind'.

Thinking of 'gifts in kind' reminds one of when petrol companies gave customers a 6d coin for every five gallons purchased; petrol was then about 9/- a gallon. Stan Betterton (who sadly died recently), being a great wag, had much delight in declaring this 6d as income. A suitable income account could not be found, and a Conservancy Instruction came around telling drivers not to accept the 6d!

On the subject of "Instructions", a little poem about Forestry Commission Instructions comes to mind:

*"The little boy asked the forester:
How long are FC roads when put together?
The forester's reply:
FC roads end on laid,
Would reach from here to Adelaide.
Likewise HQ Instructions firmly stapled
And then end-on laid down,
Would reach to Murmansk from London Town."*

A Hole Problem

By Arthur Sutton

This all started when I was at my desk in the West Sussex District Office in Chichester one day in the 1960s. The phone rang, and a lady said, "Please may I have permission to bury my horse in your forest?"

I was somewhat taken aback, but – keeping my mind firmly on the basics – I asked, "Why do you want to bury your horse in my forest?"

She replied. "Because when I was walking there yesterday, I saw a hollow that was exactly the right size."

This required some thought, so I said I would consider the matter and get in touch later. At this stage I could not resist the temptation to seek help from on high, and so I rang the Conservancy land agent. The conversation went like this:

Me: "What are the regulations governing the burial of horses on Forestry Commission land?"

Him: "Hmm"

Me: "Presumably we have to specify a minimum depth of fill?"

Him: "Hmmmmm."

Me: "And do we specify the type of fill to be used?"

Him: "Hmmmmmmmmm."

Me: "What is our policy about memorial stones? Do we lay down shape, colour and maximum size? Are you still there? Hello? **Hello!**"

By this time the noises coming down the phone had reached a gratifying level of incoherence, so, satisfied that the more amusing aspects of the occurrence would very quickly pass all round the Woking office, I rang off and returned to the job of solving the problem.

The particular forest concerned was leasehold, so my next call was to the agent of the estate which owned the land. He very quickly vetoed the request.

"That's fine," I said, "I'll just say that you do not approve."

Hastily he said, "Oh no – keep us out of it!"

So in the end I wrote to the lady regretting that we could not grant her request because we did not wish to create a precedent in such matters.

Several days later, the lady rang again. She thanked me for my letter and said she had now found a farm that specialised in looking after retired horses, and her horse was going there. I like to think of him there, happily chewing his retirement grass, blissfully unaware of the occasion when his welfare was the cause of some of the lighter moments of a District Officer's day.

The secrets of the Morehay Oaks

By Peter Fretwell

The druids planted them: that's what the local legend says. They were laid out in two huge concentric circles on the slope of the hill.

Just a few of the old trees remain now, about a dozen giant old hulks, gnarled and weathered amongst the wispy grass and younger saplings. Half of them have already succumbed to time, and you get the feeling that even the live ones are clinging by their fingertips to the last vestige of life. The rest are just slowly decaying back into the ground whence they came.

There is no longer any way of telling whether the old trees were once in a circular plan; the last few oaks keep their secret past well hidden. We'll probably never really know whether the old legend has any truth in it, whether the druids did tend the original grove. The old hulks certainly aren't telling.

What we do know about the Morehay Oaks is that they were first recorded in the realm of Henry IV, about the turn of the thirteenth century. The record says that in Henry's realm the Morehay Oaks were pollarded. This tells us two things: first, that they were mature enough to be pollarded about 600 years ago, and, second, that they were already notable enough to have the event recorded.

Old indeed, then, but exactly how old is anyone's guess. They certainly look the part: they exude age. It is almost as if they warp time as you stand there gazing at them: you can turn around, and half an hour has disappeared without your knowing it.

You can't help but be touched by them, sitting there, hoary and wrinkled, fighting against the tide of time. The size of them might have something to do with it. The biggest and fittest of them all has a girth of about 8.5 metres: big by any standard. Measuring them correctly is quite hard: the live ones have so many gnarls and knobbles it's hard to know where to start. A couple of the dead ones are almost as big, even without any of their original bark, and must have been monsters indeed a century ago.

There is something very chaotic about truly old trees. Like wizened old men, they defy the genetic code that tells them how they should look. They have lived through so many little nagging sores and bruises, breaks and aches; bunions have grown on bunions, and branches have fallen and tried to re-grow until it's hard to even hazard a guess at what they must have once looked like. It's refreshing to see them in this age when everything is moulded to our whim and is tidy or plastic. That these chaotic old totems remain untouched and unmolested is somewhat pleasing.

The Forestry Commission found them a few years ago, lost in the wood. Planted

around with younger, more vigorous trees at the start of the last century, they were slowly being starved of light and water. Since then the plantation trees have been cut back, letting the light back in, and any new growth is kept down by grazing from a small herd of cattle.

The old trees won't last forever, but one or two of them might be around for a while yet. Even the dead ones have their uses. Because they are a couple of miles from the nearest road, and a long way inside the wood, the ecology around them has been spared the trials of pollution or pesticides. They are covered head to foot in fungi in the autumn: the lack of people thereabouts has helped, I guess, and goodness only knows the richness of the insect life they support. Owls nest in them and red kites use them as convenient perches.

You won't find them on any map: the wood itself hasn't even got a proper name, even though it's one of the biggest in Northamptonshire. But if you ask the red kites in Rockingham Forest about the Morehay Oaks, they will know – and if you're lucky they might just lead you to them.

Footnote:

I reprinted this from the Woodland Trust's Verifier's newsletter because it was an evocative description of one of the Commission's sites in its Ancient Woodland Project at Rockingham Forest, which aims to convert former plantations into wood pasture. At Morehay Lawn, 68 hectares of herb-rich grassland with scattered oak pollards will be created. A number of young oaks will be pollarded to imitate traditional wood pasture management. Grazing by pigs, cattle and sheep has been introduced to maintain the wood pasture. It is home to several veteran oaks more than 600 years old, and living remnants of a medieval landscape which was cleared in the 1800s for farming. Many of them are on the Woodland Trust's Ancient Tree Hunt website. (A reminder – the trust still needs volunteer verifiers. Why not you? You'll enjoy it!)

Morehay Lawn (TL 0049 9342) can be reached by footpath from Apethorpe, King's Cliffe or Southwick, just off the A43. Put Morehay Lawn into Google for more information.



OBITUARIES

Alan Peacock remembers two colleagues. The first was **GILLIES MCLEAN**, who was born in 1940 and started with the Commission in 1986. He drove a Bri-Mec loader and then moved on to an artic low-loader. He was known as a hard-working family man who was well liked by all, and so he had many friends throughout the Commission. Gillies left a wife, Mary, children and grandchildren when he died in September.

DOUGIE GRAHAM was born in 1921 and started with the Commission in 1969 as a ploughman. When his job was phased out about 1983, he joined the road squad until he retired in 1986. Dougie was another hard-working family man from a farming background. When he died earlier last year he left a wife, Flora, a son and two daughters as well as grandchildren.

Mike Whitlock recalls **LAWRENCE (LAWRIE) TEE** who died in February aged 81. He was unusual in that he spent nearly all his life in east Hampshire. He was brought up in the area and on leaving school he joined the FC at what is now Queen Elizabeth Forest. He soon moved to Bramshill, rising to the rank of ganger and taking charge of trainees. On completion of forester training at Parkend Lawrie returned to his home territory at Alice Holt Forest. It was not long before he found himself working at the Research Station, carrying out research into the effects of animals on the growing of trees. This involved devising control measures, particularly in respect of grey squirrels and deer. He was the author or co-author of a number of publications on this subject. In connection with his work on wildlife Lawrie also spent some

time with the Agricultural Show Unit working with Tom Wilkinson and Fred Courtier. His work took him all over the country and he became well known to people in the F.C. and private forestry.

His retirement coincided with the formation of the F.C. Retirement Association (now FCA). He quickly became involved in the work of the association serving as secretary of the national committee for a period. On the death of the vice-chair, his friend Warwick Payne, he stepped into the breach but had to resign this post in 2008 owing to ill health. He was also chair of the East England Branch until it was disbanded. At the group level he served at various times as chair, secretary and treasurer. He maintained his commitment and interest in the FCA right until the end of his life.

Those who knew Lawrie realised that he was a man with independent views which did not always coincide with what others were thinking. However he was very supportive of all the organisations of which he was a member. Our sympathy is extended to his wife Barbara and to his two daughters and their families. A giant, both physically and metaphorically has passed from our midst.

GEORGE PARKER'S son tells us of the death of his father in November 2008, just weeks short of his 90th birthday. George had worked for the Commission for more than half a century in Hamsterley, Byrness, Kielder, Chopwell and Slaley.

Born as the eldest male in a family of seven, and quickly realising he would have to help fund the family upbringing, he left school and started in private forestry before graduating from Dean FTS.

During the Second World War he served with the Green Howards regiment, and was rescued from the beaches at Dunkirk. He returned to wartime duties on timber production at Hamsterley Forest, where he met his future wife, Rosella, to whom he was married for 61 years.

He worked at Byrness and Plashetts, putting his family on the steam train at Plashetts every day to travel to school at Kielder. He used to tell of the 1947 winter, when he and his workers put tennis racquets on a horse's hooves to pull a sledge over Carter Bar to Jedburgh, to bring back bread for the whole community. The snow in places was higher than the telegraph poles!

He moved on to Chopwell Woods, where he remained for 17 very happy years as the area's longest-serving head forester. He managed not only Chopwell Woods, but also Spen Banks, Gibside, Ravensworth and Beamish, as the head of a 30-strong team. He refused to move or be promoted whilst his three children, David, Cynthia and Ian, completed their education at Hookergate Grammar School.

Eventually he returned to Kielder, where he

managed Kielder Hearts football team and won the annual leek show. He was also a close friend of upper North Tyne shepherd Wattie Beattie, from remote Wainhope, with whom he and Rosella enjoyed endless sessions of the card game nap until dawn broke.

The flooding of the valley to provide Kielder Reservoir saw him lose his home at Plashetts. George moved on to Slaley, where he served as head forester for a further 12 years to complete 50 years' service.

On retirement in 1988 he moved to Heddon on the Wall, where he and Rosella developed a wonderful garden. Sadly, Rosella died some years ago, and George never really got over his loss.

Lena Birchall tells of the passing of **WENDY LAMPARD**, who was born in Canada in 1925.

The family returned to England when she was 14 and settled near Farnham. After leaving school she worked locally, where she met Peter Lampard, her future husband. When she married she was working at Alice Holt Research Station, first as a typist, then as Secretary and PA to more than one Director. She cycled daily to work through Alice Holt Forest.

On retirement she was secretary to the FCA Group at Alice Holt. Recently, due to failing health, they moved to Northumberland to be near their daughter. Peter died in March last year and Wendy in August. A memorial service was held in Rowledge Church, where they were married.

Letters to the Editor



I refer to John Zehmayr's footnote regarding the dominance of the Macdonalds in post-war Forestry Commission research, and recall that for a while in the early 1950s staffing was as follows:

Director Research & Education, James Macdonald; Silviculture (N) Edinburgh, J.A.B. Macdonald; Research H/F Fort Augustus, Angus Macdonald; research forester Mabie, Murdo Macdonald; Ex. School ganger, Research, Alex Macdonald; Forestry School Instructor, Roddy Macdonald.

Quite a clannish state of affairs!

Ted Baldwin

I recall in the early 1970s that Angus Macdonald's son Hamish joined Soil Survey, so continuing the clan position. Ed.

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