FCA today Summer

The newsletter about former Forestry Commission employees

Issue 49 - Summer 2013

From the Editor

This issue features many articles that have **not** been contributed by members. I have had to find copy from other sources. My appeals for copy have fallen on deaf ears. There is almost nothing in the pot for the Winter issue.
So please get writing, otherwise – no issue.

We had a successful AGM in May organised by the Yorkshire group. The AGM itself and dinner were held in a very historic building in York, Lady Anne Middleton Hotel, and the tour visited Castle Howard.

Full details with photos can be found on the website, check on the Message Board. Geoff Barry took the photos, look for the well kent faces. My word they do look fit!

Richard Toleman

Contents

FCA Today

Sheer Nostalgia

by Martin Fletcher

Musing over some nostalgic parts of one's FC career. the article below picks out some of the more amusing and interesting aspects.

The Peculiarities of FC Forms

The ***A4*** really takes the biscuit. This pocket size enumerated form, in pads of 50, about the size of a box of Swan Vesta matches, was a receipt for money given out by the FC, i.e. the opposite of the ***A35***. They had to be guarded with the penalty of a warning letter if lost, but so much for security. I remember throwing away a couple of books, one part used, when clearing out an old office.

In times of high fire danger, following a Conservancy Instruction, and carrying everything one needed to fight a fire, it stated you also had to include a book of ***A4***'s. This was just in case you enlisted help from a member of the public and then having given them a couple of quid, you had to ask them to sign for it on an ***A4***. Of course ***A/C Gen 3z*** could be used in the same way.

Now what about the ***U3a***. We all know the ***U3b Conveyance Note*** but ***U3a***'s, called I think ***Conversion Notes***, were put to a much more devious use. The same size as ***U3b***'s but with green ink on the top copy and a buff counterfoil, these little beasties were a tremendous help in sorting out the Hoppus foot volumes on the ***S6***. For instance it was possible to convert a product, say 100 small pit props, to a larger size. For example, 100 x 3' by 3" top diameter could be changed to 100 x 3' by 3½" TD, and also for correcting the stock ledger after 'taking up' or stocking. The ***S6***, being like double entry book keeping only with timber produce in H ft, was a nightmare to balance if very rigorous checks were not kept.

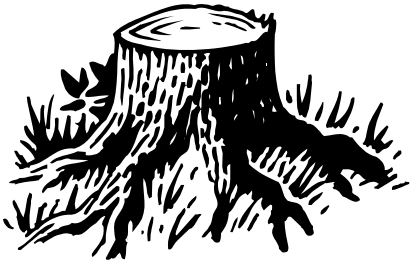
Then there were pads of forms ***A74b***'s, to claim compensation for fires started by steam engines from The British Transport Commission. Don't forget that other nefarious form the ***FC34***, whereby the DO could, at a glance, spot any slack in piecework rate setting. Also I have seen a copy in the New Forest of a ***B10 Loss of Stores Report***, being submitted to the Conservancy Office, for a 20p GAIN on a camp site day's takings!

The ***R1*** of course, was by far the most useful form, collating plant seed provenance to compartments planted. This may have been designed by Lord Robinson and to perpetuate his name, was the only form with the prefix R.

(Is this correct? Can we still identify today origins of yesteryear plantings? Is the modern FC capable of retaining such records over the life of a crop? Any ideas? Ed.)

Stump Treatment

Now some reflections on stump treatment.



In the Dean when I started, creosote was in vogue. Then someone spilt half a gallon on the grassy bank on the Sundial Ride, just opposite the front door of the Speech House. The patch of dead grass was there for 10 years or more!

Then the Dean changed to sodium nitrate, which was fine until at least one horse on timber extraction took a few gulps and dropped dead. Polybor came in next. This was a powdered boron compound and when mixed

Continued on next page »

Sheer Nostalgia *continued*

with water was a clear liquid. So it had to be mixed with a blue dye, called Methyial Violet, at a teaspoon to a gallon. The blue dye was so fine and hydrophilic that it got into everything. This dye should not be confused with the Waxoline Red used with gas oil and 245-T.

Simultaneously along came Peniophera for pine stump treatment. It was very temperature sensitive, being a fungus in suspension, and was diluted daily in water with any left over then thrown away. The concentrate needed fridges and little cool boxes for transport, not easy in forest conditions.

Finally someone came up with pre-dyed boxes of urea prills that made life very much easier.

Office Archaeology

In moving around southern England, both before and after retirement, and as a bit of a detective, the evidence of long lost Forest Offices remain from the halcyon days of 450 forests in the FC estate, in the early sixties.

The main give away feature is usually some under thinned scraggy NS. This was planted long ago near the office for Christmas trees and totally forgotten when it closed down. Closer examination usually reveals some coils of rusty 10 swg or maybe even 8 swg mild steel wire. You might even find the odd WW II balloon cable drum, so loved as a seat by the inhabitants of wet weather sheds.

The concrete base of the office can sometimes be found, with evidence of where the safe was bolted down. Likewise, a short distance away, was the base of the wet weather shed and maybe even the skeleton framework of the 600 gallon gas oil tank amongst the bramble and scrub. Kick amongst the leaf litter and you will find old winch cables or if you are lucky enough, an Alice Holt drawbar. Every site has different treasures of the good old days.

Ex FC houses immediately manifest themselves when you see two or more together with a Lawson Cypress hedge, or maybe occasionally even a western hemlock one, and the odd Douglas fir in the garden.

As you travel by train on the mainline from Didcot to Oxford, look out for large Douglas firs as you approach Oxford on the western side of the track.

You can tell who was employed at the Kennington Research Nursery by a huge Douglas fir or Leyland cypress in the back garden.

Enough reminiscing on the idiosyncrasies of the FC in an earlier incarnation. Perhaps it is time we repeated the old ditty, much loved by Dermot Bevan, eminent FC entomologist and editor of that amusingly written pamphlet Entopath News. “Why didn’t the female Hylobius cross the road” Answer on page ……..

Answer: “Because the Hylastes ater”

Post Script. Now come along all you retirees, the editor is crying out for copy or FCA Today will die. It does not take long to put pen to paper and there must be lots of stories out there to be told, it need not be 1,000 words like this story. I would like to rest my pen having contributed every year for the past eight years.

(Martin – don't do that, you're all we've got! Ed)

Scots Pine
Scotland's Proposed National Tree

by Professor T.C. Smout

The news that Scots pine is proposed for Scotland's national tree is welcome; the old Caledonian pine woods are among the most beautiful places in Scotland.

However, the statistic confidently and repeatedly related by pine wood charities that only one percent of the area once occupied by Scots pine remains under pine today, is highly misleading. It ignores the research both of environmental scientists like Cindy Froyd, formerly at Cambridge and now at Oxford University, and Richard Tipping at Stirling University, and of environmental historians. There is, in fact, no way to tell how much of Scotland was covered with pine at any one time in the past, as the tree came and went in different places at different times, the variation in range primarily driven by climate. It probably reached its peak over 4000 years ago when indeed its range stretched, unevenly, between Caithness (briefly even to Hoy) and Stirlingshire. Its decline between then and about 2000 years ago was dramatic, and apparently mainly due to natural causes, though the spread of prehistoric human farming and grazing by domestic animals must have had a part to play.

By the time the Romans came the extent of Scots pine was possibly in aggregate not vastly greater than today, and at the end of the middle ages the great majority of the woods that were in existence then are in existence still, though some may have been larger. Perhaps a dozen woods have vanished (or almost so) since 1600, mainly in the rainy west or at high altitudes, during the so-called Little Ice Age of the seventeenth century when wet, wind and cold increased.

Old tales that attribute the decline of the pinewoods to the Romans, the Vikings and the English iron masters of the eighteenth century are just plain wrong, though still retailed with gusto by (for example) Chris Packham on the BBC in a recent Autumn Watch programme.

Scots pine in Scotland is at the western edge of its world range, and very susceptible to climatic change. It is admirable to be allowing pine to regenerate more widely in and around ancient woods like Abernethy and Glen Moriston.

To be planting it in places where it has never grown before, or only grew many thousands of years ago in quite different circumstances of climate and soil (for which the Forestry Commission will even give grants), is not restoring lost ecosystems, but making up new ones.

(First published in The Herald, 14th January 2013)

Scots Pine in History and Folklore

by Karen Bell

All evergreens were considered symbols of life and immortality, especially the Scots Pine. Pine cones were considered representative of the male genitals and were considered a masculine fertility symbol. Flaming pine branches were whirled clockwise round the beds of mothers with newborn babies to purify and protect them.

Scots Pine was considered the King of the Forest and was the tree of heroes, chieftains and warriors. This was the tree that was planted on the graves of Scottish warriors who died in battle or were renowned in their time.

The Scots Pine is the tree that made up most of the ancient Caledonian Pine Forest and when we visit the remnants of these ancient forests, you can still feel the awesome power that struck fear into the hearts of our ancestors.

The resin from the tree was used as a healing ointment for boils and sores, the bark was used for fevers and the young buds for scurvy.
Pine resin was also added to paint, varnish and tar to make it more effective and the tar was often used for waterproofing and sealing the hulls of boats.

Pine logs were also used in boat building. These were always cut at the waxing moon when the sap of the tree was at its highest as this made the boat more buoyant and durable. The roots of the pine tree were beaten and separated into thread like fibres and then spun like hemp to produce rope for tying boats. This particular rope was used for tying boats because, like the logs the rope made from the roots of the pine tree were extremely buoyant.

Forestry Commission Scotland on Facebook

The Official FCS page 'Enjoyscotlandsforests' is now active! Whether you are planning a day out, want to know what's on in your area, or you want the latest news on wildlife, mountain biking, walking, cycling, camping, stargazing or any of the other great activities taking place in forest locations across Scotland, visit the Forestry Commission Scotland's new Facebook page:
http://www.facebook.com/enjoyscotlandsforests

Sorbus Leyana

by Peter Charlesworth

An article appeared in the Western Mail on 9th July 2010 entitled *Naturalists go wild over the future of a rare species.* It goes on to say that in 1957, one of the founder members of the Merthyr and District Naturalists' Society identified a Ley's whitebeam at Penmoelallt. At that time the FC had just acquired 1500ac. there which included the woodland where the Sorbus grew, and I was the newly appointed assistant forester.

The founder member of the society was a local school teacher. He had access to the gymnasium where he put we local team football players through our paces. He enquired about my work and I replied that I was assistant forester at Penmoelallt. He immediately invited me to join him that Saturday afternoon to see a tree that he had recently discovered on a limestone escarpment in the Taff valley. On reaching the tree, and referring to a text book, he identified it as a very rare whitebeam. The book had been written by the Rev. Ley and the tree had been named after him, Sorbus leyana.

The numbers of S. leyana stay remarkably low because of the way it reproduces, breeding new micro species by hybridising with rowan (S. aucuparia). Unlike common whitebeam, it can produce seed without pollination forming clones, but it also has this strong association with rowan.

Two years ago, I called in on Dr. Natasha de Vere at the National Botanic Garden of Wales, where she is Head of Conservation and Research and who has a keen interest in the development and survival of S. leyana. I was able to verify the hearsay that seed had been collected in 1957 and taken to Tal-y-Bont forest and sown at Usk nursery. I confirmed that 7 seedlings had been raised that were suitable for replanting at the parent site at Penmoelallt.

Dr. de Vere told me the original tree at Penmoelallt had perished but regeneration had occurred at the spot where the tree canopy had been opened. Six of the original plants had

Continued on next page

Sorbus Leyana *continued*

Continued from previous page

survived while the present regeneration was partly Ley's whitebeam and partly rowan. As they both appeared in the open space which, if either, was the more light demanding? The answer to this will add to the characteristics of S. leyana and its survival.

More can be discovered about Ley's whitebeam on Google eg. www.gardenofwales.org.uk Also look at S. leyana fieldwork. A specimen has been planted at the Garw Nant V. C.

Register for news releases on the Forestry Commission website and choose the topics that interest you. Go to http://www.forestry.gov.uk/website/newssubs.nsf/subscription?openform
All news releases are also on the main Forestry Commission website in the 'News' section.

For the latest FCA news, check the Message Board on the FCA website at
www.fca-today.com

Website Message Board

If you have any news, announcements or forthcoming events, post or e-mail the details to the editor. Contact details are on the back page of this magazine.

www.fca-today.com

Felling Eucalyptus Regnans in Victoria, Australia

by Eric Crofts

In July 1950 I saw an advert in the Melbourne newspaper said, "Skiing weekend…skis supplied…contact…".

Jack Campbell and I left Melbourne one Saturday morning and at Warragul, we went north to Noojee and the Great Dividing Range.

We climbed Mount Bawbaw (5120ft) to the tiny settlement of Tanjil Bren (3000ft). We entered the belt of Mountain ash (E. regnans) and climbed to the huts, house and abandoned sawmill of Newlyn (3500ft).

I gawked, open-mouthed, at the trees around the clearing. They were immense, tall, thick, and straight with bare trunks that were supported by wide buttresses. The only branches were away up at the top.

Jack and I shared a hut. It had two beds, a big fireplace and an oil-lamp. There was plenty of firewood outside. We lit the fire and took our mess tins to the kitchen in the house for our sausages and tea. We sat on a bed in front of the now-blazing fire to eat and drink. "This is alright!"

The next day we carried our skis up a well-marked track to a gentle slope with snow and scattered, malformed trees at about 4,500ft. and had a good day's skiing.

We returned to the hut before dark where we met one of the lads felling the huge trees and invited him over after tea. Our guest was leaving the next Friday and I thought about this the following day. I hadn't come to stay or to make my fortune. I only wanted to see Australia and have new experiences. Here was a chance to fell trees that were more than twice as thick and tall as any I had seen in Scotland. I phoned the company office and had a job.

When felling we worked in pairs, I was with Wally. We axed four 2in holes in buttresses at chest height and hammered in pegs. Standing on these, we did the same again and again until the top ones were on the trunk. We circled this with planks. On one side we sawed horizontally as far as possible, then axed a V. We did the same on the other side. We extended the Vs until the huge tree stood on a tall pillar of wood. We sawed and chopped a V on the downhill side then removed most planks and pegs. We went in on the uphill side until sawing became difficult. Then we sawed and wedged, sawed and wedged. Finally Wally shouted "Get down". I got behind an uphill tree. When the wedges were free, Wally put them and the hammer into the bag and threw it down, then he joined me. The tree started to fall, branches broke off. Massive chunks rained down. The tree crashed down and roared away downhill. Carrying the saw, spade, tape and our axes, we went after it.

The crown was shattered, but enough remained to bow the trunk. We had to uppercut. We sawed down as far as possible then took turns to stand on top and chop Vs in the sides. We dug a crosswise trench, knelt down and sawed upwards. As the tree settled sawing became easier. Eventually tree and crown separated. We measured 33ft and did the same again. From one tree, we usually got five 33 foot logs, a 20 footer and a very thick shorter one. Every log had an incised groove for the extraction cable.

Continued on next page ⟶

Felling Eucalyptus Regnans in Victoria, Australia

continued

Continued from previous page

Extracting was done using a bulldozer. Starting with the longest logs, they were hauled to the landing. Wally and I sat or stood on the last one. The logs lay on the long, wide, raised ramp on the forest side of the clearing. At the other side was a motor winch. Its cable went through a pulley block suspended above and just beyond the edge of the ramp. The logging truck backed under the pulley and its trolley was unloaded and attached to the truck. The winch cable was coiled around the first log rolling it on to the trolley bolsters. The other logs followed until the truck was loaded. I continued felling for some time. I never made a fortune but I learned a lot about felling big trees!

In 1952 I left Australia after an extensive tour across the continent.

The 6 weeks trip home was very pleasant with stops at Colombo and Aden. I slept under the stars on the top deck in the Arabian and Red Seas, looked up at smoking Mount Etna and rose before dawn to see the Rock of Gibraltar.

As we came up the Channel we clearly saw fields, trees and houses. A girl from NZ said “Isn’t it green!” I felt a surge of pride. Yes. This often cloudy, often wet, often cool dear old land o’ mine was green; a beautiful benign green.

View or download earlier issues of FCA Today from the FCA website at: -

www.fca-today.com

Shetland Hazelnuts May be First for 4,500 years

Now here's a thing. Hazelnuts have been found growing on Shetland for the first time in 4,500 years, it was revealed this week.

What a discovery! Our humble hazel – Corylus avellana – producing fruit where science tells us it can't or shouldn't. Hazels require an average temperature in September of 12 degrees C to set viable fruit. But Shetland has an average September temperature of only 10.5 degrees C – and the summer of 2012 was not particularly warm.

The discovery has astonished naturalists, who believed the climate in Britain's most northerly islands was too harsh for hazelnuts to grow.

Until now, the only hazelnuts on Shetland could be found in supermarkets or in fragmentary remains buried in the layers of peat set down between 4,500 and 9,000 years ago. Hazel is a tree of the western seaboards in Scotland forming very extensive stands.

These 'Atlantic hazelwoods' are older than the oakwoods and older than many of our Caledonian pinewoods. Indeed, pollen evidence shows that hazel has been there for 10,000 years.

But 24 hazelnuts have been discovered on three out of 30 hazel shrubs which have fruited for the first time since they were planted in the late 1990s. The hazel shrubs that had borne the fruit had been planted at the Loch of Voe around 1998 from seeds taken from saplings at Torridon in the north-west Highlands.

And will this discovery unlock further secrets – like those of the Staosnaig hazelnuts on Colonsay where, in 1995, archaeologists found evidence of very large-scale nut-processing, radio-carbon dated to c9000 years ago? The scale and location of the activity there was also thought to be unusual, suggesting that the island community was trading processed hazelnuts with other island and mainland communities.

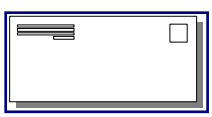
If they weren't carried in baskets hazelnuts might also have made the trip by sea quite by themselves. If you take some hazelnuts and put them in a bucket of water, they do indeed float, seemingly without any harm coming to them. It is not known however if they can remain viable after an extended period in sea water but perhaps we will find, like the Shetland experience, that hazelnuts have capacity beyond our expectations.

Sources: The Scotsman 5th March 2013 and Scottish Native Woods

Do you have any articles for publication in this magazine?

Send your articles to the editor

by e-mail to: editor@fca-today.com



by post to: Richard Toleman,
Manuel Stables,
Linlithgow,
EH49 6JF.

OBITUARY

JANE LINES, wife of Roger, passed away this June. She suffered from chronic rheumatoid arthritis for many years and recently lost her sight due to macular degeneration. This did not stop her from caring for Roger who suffered from dementia in later years.

Jane and Roger made many dear friends through the Forestry Commission and as Jane was a keen naturalist and birdwatcher, she enjoyed going on a number of forest visits.

Send your letters to the editor for publication in FCA Today

by e-mail to: editor@fca-today.com

by post to: Richard Toleman,
Manuel Stables, Linlithgow, EH49 6JF.

Visit the FCA Today website at: -

www.fca-today.com

Forestry Commission Association
Management Committee

Contacts

FCA Today editor: -
Richard Toleman
Manuel Stables
Linlithgow
EH49 6JF

Telephone: 01506 845575
e-mail: editor@fca-today.com

e-mail membership enquiries to: -
membership@fca-today.com

FCA Today Magazine

The next issue of the FCA Today magazine will be available (depending on whether we receive any articles from you) on the **www.fca-today.com** website on **5th December 2013.**

Articles for inclusion in the next issue of the magazine should be sent to the editor before 1st November 2013.

The new fixed publication dates of the FCA Today magazine are: -

Spring edition: 5th April

Summer edition: 5th August

Winter edition: 5th December

Visit the FCA Today website on these dates to download the latest edition of the magazine

Send your articles to the editor for publication in FCA Today

by e-mail to: editor@fca-today.com

by post to: Richard Toleman,
Manuel Stables,
Linlithgow,
EH49 6JF.

FCA Today is an FCA production
Editor: Richard Toleman, Manuel Stables, Linlithgow, EH49 6JF. Tel: 01506 845575. e-mail: editor@fca-today.com