



From the Editor

What more can I say about my plea for copy. After my last appeal I had the usual stalwarts e-mailing and in one case writing. The latter will be good for improving my typing skills and I'll even accept copy the latest fashionable way – on a tablet of stone!

Don't leave it to others to write, if you want to read our newsletter, why don't you write?

I have received many contributions about past days, how about today and now. Things that you do in retirement are always of interest. What about your extreme hobby that you kept quiet about in your FC days? Now is the time to reveal it. Get writing.

Richard Toleman



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Minutes of the Forestry Commission Association Annual General Meeting Held at the Crown Hotel, Mundford, Norfolk on 12th May 2015

Present: Charles Dickens, Richard Toleman, Simon Malone, Val Marsh, Eric Rogers, (Breckland); Arthur Miller, Ken Searson, (North Wales); Bart Venner, (Dean); Chris Griffin, Dorothy Munn, George Bruce (Yorkshire).

Charles Dickens proposed that the local Breckland Group chair the meeting. Seconded Richard Toleman and agreed that Simon Malone act as Chair for the meeting.

Chairman welcomed visitors to the meeting and introductions were made around the table.

Apologies for absence: West Argyll Group, North Scotland Group, Peter Webb - Peninsula Group

Minutes of the AGM held in 2014 were approved by the meeting. Proposed Richard Toleman, seconded George Bruce. Carried unanimously.

Matters arising. The subject of discounts for FCA members using FC car parks and attending events was discussed. Richard Toleman read a letter from Ted Baldwin who had suffered a bad experience at a car park where a local member of staff had incorrectly refused him the right to park for free. There had been other examples of this occurrence. Charles Dickens had been in touch with HQ Edinburgh and a response was awaited. He would continue to pursue this to ensure that staff at district level were aware of the agreement. Group secretaries would continue to issue membership cards and windscreen stickers but these were not commonly available.

Mike Whitlock had queried the situation regarding a Welfare Officer for the FC. It was believed that there was no longer such an officer and this work was now contracted out.

Acting Treasurer's Report. Charles Dickens circulated his report which had been audited by Elizabeth Holmes, Head of Internal Audit, HQ. He confirmed receipt of the annual donation of £1500 from the FC. He also pointed out the healthy balance which had increased significantly due to the transfer of funds from two now defunct Groups - Alice Holt and Edinburgh and South Scotland. Richard Toleman proposed an increase in the honorarium currently paid to Diane Birkett for her work in managing the FCA website. He proposed increasing it from £100 to £150 per year on the basis of three editions of the FCA Magazine at £50 per edition. This proposal was seconded by Bart Venner and carried unanimously.

The proposal to sign off the accounts was made by Bart Venner, seconded Chris Griffin and carried unanimously.

FCA Today and Website - Editor's Report. Richard Toleman made a passionate plea for members to produce more copy for him and encouraged members to seek contributions from non FCA members whose work and interests connected closely to the work and history of the FC.

Group Reports

Please see appendix for a summary of Group Reports received.

Review of relationship between North & South Wales Groups and Natural Resources Wales.

Arthur Miller gave a review of the current situation. NRW and the Environment Agency were the big players with the old FC organisation very much a minor participant. Many FC staff have left or were considering doing so and staff morale was very low. NRW had agreed to let ex-FC staff who were retiring, know about opportunities to join the FCA and he confirmed that this was happening. Ken Searson said that a recent survey of staff revealed 14% have no faith in their current

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Minutes of the Forestry Commission Association AGM 2015 *continued*

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management, with examples of ridiculously large work contracts being placed blanket fashion over the whole of Wales, with consequences for how such contracts could be managed. A lengthy discussion followed over how to improve connections between ex-FC staff and the FCA but no firm proposals were developed.

Review of FCA Constitution

A proposal to move National AGMs to a biennial basis had been put forward. Arthur Miller said he could see arguments both for and against. However his instinct was to leave the situation as it was. This was on the basis that we were currently well funded to afford annual meetings and that there was a risk that the FC might seek to discontinue their donation to the FCA if we failed to request it for a missing year. It was also generally felt that any lessening of the work of the National AGM would further speed the decline of interest in the ongoing day to day work of the FCA. There was general agreement that we continue with annual AGMs.

It was agreed that the constitution be amended to read "...subscription rates will be reviewed at each AGM."

It was agreed that Charles Dickens's position as Acting Treasurer and FCA Liaison Officer, and Richard Toleman's position as Editor should be reviewed at each AGM, subject to their agreement to continue in these positions.

It was agreed that group committees should consist of a minimum of Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer, and that there would be no upper limit on the size of a committee. Having three officers as a minimum was seen as protecting the interest of group members as best as possible in the management of their group's affairs.

It was agreed that membership to be interchangeable between groups. Annual and life members who moved home would be accepted by their new local group as if they had subscribed to that new local group in the first place.

With these adjustments to the proposed new Constitution it was proposed by Arthur Miller, seconded Bart Venner and carried unanimously that the new Constitution be adopted.

Outlook for 2015/16 and beyond

Richard Toleman reviewed the list of groups likely to be available and willing to continue to participate as hosts for future AGMs. This meant a short list of North Wales, Dean, Breckland, Yorkshire, North Scotland and South Wales as realistically being the only groups available. He ruled out Peninsula and Argyll due to the geography of their locations. He proposed a running order for the next few years as follows.

2016 Dean (This is dependent on revitalisation of the Group which is currently under discussion and Bart Venner would investigate and report back in the near future).

2017 North Wales (This could be brought forward to 2016 if the Dean Group feel unhappy about taking it on)

2018 North Scotland

2019 Yorkshire - this would also be the 100th anniversary year of the founding of the FC

2020 South Wales

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Minutes of the Forestry Commission Association AGM 2015 *continued*

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Any Other Business

Breckland Group queried which costs could be reimbursed to the Group for payments made in arranging the AGM. Charles Dickens said the Group should forward receipts for Lynford Hall and the Crown Hotel and confirmed that the cost of the mid-morning coffee during the field visit could be reimbursed.

The meeting closed at 4:45 and the Chairman thanked members for attending.

Appendix - Group Reports.

Charles Dickens read out reports from Groups not present at the meeting.

South Wales - The age of the members as in any Retirement Group meant a struggle to organise a trip to suit all abilities and tastes. It may be that future gatherings would be lunch out at different venues. A visit to the Dolau Cothi Gold Mines in September was attended by 12 members and then a visit to a mixed woodland in the area was very interesting. They had Christmas lunch at Brecon and this was attended by 25 members. The group has a following on Facebook and 2 new members.

Peninsula - The group was well spread over a large area but meetings and the Christmas lunch were well attended. The accounts were healthy and they had 8 life members, 11 annual members and 8 spouses. There had been an average attendance of 22 at the lunch meetings and a good turnout for the Christmas lunch. There was every hope that the group would continue in the foreseeable future.

North Scotland - The membership of the group was 67. It had reduced the programme and had managed 2 excursions, some pub lunches and a Christmas Lunch. It would continue and had enough resources in the bank at present.

Argyll - It had a membership of 21 together with 7 partners. It had a good financial account and would continue with monthly meetings and a Christmas lunch. The meetings had had a varied theme from First Aid to a presentation of a pilgrimage to Nepal.

Contributions were offered from members present for the following Groups

North Wales - There were 80 members and 11 associate members. The group had a committee of 14 and met twice a year. There were 3 field trips during 2014 with an average of 25 members attending each visit. A Christmas carvery lunch at Rhiw Goch, Bronaber was well attended with a guest speaker and a DVD running showing past group events and members. The group's finances were in a healthy state.

Yorkshire - The report started on a sad note stating that Cliff Featherstone had passed away. Cliff was also at Thetford Forest during his long career with FC. There were enjoyable outings during the year including, Castle Howard, Jodrell Bank and Chatsworth. A well attended Christmas lunch was held in Pickering. Membership stood at 39 and finances were good.

Forest of Dean - After returning from last year's National AGM a decision was to be made on the group's future within FCA. It was decided to try a social type group with possible local visits and meetings. During the year after more discussions with a recently retired Deputy Surveyor, a push for recruitment would take place on the recently retired staff in the area. It was hoped to form a

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Minutes of the Forestry Commission Association AGM 2015 *continued*

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small working group to assist in carrying out, in conjunction with FC, projects that needed attention. The work would help tidy up areas that were not being worked on due to lack of current staff available to carry out these tasks. A further update would be made at the next national AGM.

Breckland - Current membership was 38 with 27 spouses. 3 new members joined in the year. The AGM lunch in April and a Christmas dinner in early January were both well attended. There was an outing to Stoke Bruerne for a canal boat trip and pub lunch. A BBQ was held in June with 26 attending and an evening talk on the history of the Brecks was organised in November raising £50 for Air Ambulance by bucket collection. It was difficult to get enough members to maintain an active committee, but a similar range of activities were planned for 2015/16.



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www.fca-today.com

The Wave

By Arthur Miller

This is not a story about saying farewell to loved ones, or a trip on the Mersey Ferry, but is the tale of an adventure that we took in 2013 and may be of interest to those who like unusual places.

It all started with an e-mail from my pal, Don, in America. He wrote 'I know of a neat hike that we can do in Utah. Do you fancy it?' A word of caution here. If an American says he knows of a neat hike, it is likely to cause you some discomfort and will involve height, heat and heart problems, or a combination of all three! But me? I just said 'Yes!'

We had to go on-line to enter a ballot, as only twenty people per day are allowed to enter this bit of wilderness. To enter the ballot one has to watch a ten minute safety film first. (Warnings of extreme heat, high elevation, desiccation, exposure, snakes and getting lost. Nothing serious then). Then you tick the box to show that you have seen it, that you accept the risk, and that you still want to go. I paid my \$5 and entered the ballot. As it happened, he was fortunate and I was not. So we went in on his ticket.

The hike involved an 8 mile out and back trek to a wind-sculpted rock formation across a rocky desert with a 250ft ascent at the end. There are

no Maps! The directions consist of a series of photographs with the comment 'Go to the right of these rocks' or 'Turn left at the bush'

Nothing daunted May 22nd 2013 saw us heading out of the small town of Kanab at 7am, to drive 40 miles along the highway to a side road of 8 miles of dust and stones. (Imagine a forest road on steroids). At 8 am we parked up, with the temperature pushing 60°F.

So we set off, up a dry draw (stream bed) to a faint path that went to the right through the sage brush that was tall enough to hide my wife, Jean, from view. Then followed a fifty foot climb up a slick rock slope to see the desert itself laid out before us. We had walked only half a mile thus far. Then it was a series of soft sand, hard rock, steep inclines and no shade.

The mesquite bushes were not very tall. The further we walked, the hotter it got. As an ex-forester I took to the high ground whenever possible, and kept looking back to fix my mind on the route out. Don was more practical – he had a GPS.



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The Wave *continued*

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I was fascinated by all the tracks of wild animals that we found, ranging from small lizards and gophers to coyotes. As the day became warmer, so the wildlife took to the shade. At 10.30 we arrived at the final pitch up to the Wave. It was dry sand over slick rock, and quite treacherous. We managed the climb by dint of hand-holding, some kneeling down and the judicious use of walking sticks. It was well worth it!

The Wave is very difficult to describe but very easy to point your camera at. Even then it somehow it defies both photographs and descriptions. However, I shall try. Imagine a series of prehistoric sand dunes that have been laid down over many years with strata of different coloured sands, such as those at Alum Chine. Then they are twisted and folded out of level, and carved by sand particles carried on the wind from surrounding deserts. The result is a series of smooth curves that reflect light and colour in an amazing array of outcrops and troughs.

For about an hour we wandered around the site, marvelling at the colours and shapes, and taking more photographs than we could possibly ever look at. Oh the joys of Digital Cameras! We had lunch in the shade of one of the side slots before setting off back to the trail head. The temperature by now was 90°F.

The trail back was over the same ground as the way in. We added our contributions to the little stone cairns that had been left by previous hikers to give some indication of our route. We also told the other walkers on their way in exactly how to get to the Wave, being by now, desert experts, and at the same time, trying to ensure that we did not pass out from thirst and heat. Once again we were surprised at the number of delicate flowers in the desert around us. Cactus blooms are beautiful.

Then it was back to the pick-up by 2.30 pm, a journey to town for a long cool drink at a garage store, followed by a doze. We had earned it.

This trip would not have been possible without the help and support of our good friends, Don and Lusha Alzner, who live in Montana and are very experienced mountain and desert hikers. We lived as neighbours in Brandon, Suffolk in the mid sixties and have kept in touch for almost 50 years.

For an explanation of the origin of this amazing place and for more pictures, look up 'Hike the Wave, Utah' on Google.



The People's History of Thetford Forest

With the centenary of the Forestry Commission fast approaching, now is the perfect time to gather the memories of those who have worked for it in earlier years and this is exactly what is happening in the East England District.

With its focus on Thetford Forest, at the heart of the region, an oral history project is now underway as part of the 'Breaking New Ground' Landscape Partnership Scheme funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.



Thetford Forest, at 19,000 hectares freehold, is the largest lowland pine forest in England, but it is not an ancient forest. Its first trees were planted in the 1920s, shortly after the Forestry Commission was established in 1919 to replenish the nation's timber resource depleted in World War One.

As part of the Public Forest Estate, Thetford is now managed for wildlife and recreation as well as timber production. Project Organisers Anne Mason and Victoria Tustian know the importance of recording the changes that have taken

place in forest management and the impact on local people of having this forest in the landscape.

'Just talking to current FC staff shows how relatively quickly practices change' commented Anne Mason. 'Paul McCreath, harvester and forwarder operator who has been with the Commission for forty years, recalls that in the 1970s there were one hundred and twenty people doing what five do now'.



The People's History of Thetford Forest Project aims to seek out the people who have lived and worked in the Forest, employed in a variety of roles and allied trades. The project will record their stories, memories, knowledge and experience alongside those in equivalent roles today, to compare changes in working practices and conditions. The project is also looking for volunteers to become interviewers. Training in interviewing techniques and archiving the recordings will be provided and we also have an archive of old photographs at the Santon Downham Office which require scanning and filing.

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The People's History of Thetford Forest *continued*

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Though this is a locally-based project, there will be members of the Retirement Association who have worked in Thetford Forest during their career who could help put names to faces; suggest dates for the photographs and explain images of past forestry operations.

If you are reading this as an ex-forester or have family links with Thetford Forest, you could record your memories for the project.

The project will be incomplete if it fails to reach current or retired Forestry Commission staff with experience of working at Thetford.

Please get in touch by: -

Telephoning 01223 775102 or

Emailing victoria.tustian@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

or telephone Anne Mason 01760 755685

or email anne@providence28.fsnet.co.uk

to receive more details.

* Notes on Breaking New Ground

The Breaking New Ground partnership will be delivering a £2.2M scheme with a series of new and exciting landscape and heritage conservation projects for the Brecks, thanks to a £1.5M grant from the Heritage Lottery. The partnership is made up of regional, national and local organisations with an interest in the area, community groups and members of the community and includes:

Suffolk County Council, Norfolk County Council, Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury District Councils, RSPB, Natural England, English Heritage, Forestry Commission, University of East Anglia, Suffolk Wildlife Trust, Norfolk Wildlife Trust, The Breckland Society, Farm Conservation, Icení botanic Artists, Green Light Trust, Plantlife, Norfolk Geodiversity Partnership, Orchard Barn Environmental Education CIC, Ancient House Museum.

The funding comprises just under £1.5million for delivery of the project with the remainder contributed by the partner organisations and volunteer input.

Breaking New Ground will be hosted by Suffolk County Council at Brandon Country Park which is in the heart of the area and provides a convenient and accessible location for participants and partners, and is the location for a number of public participation events.

The Scheme outputs will concentrate on a 253km² area within the Brecks, including Brandon and Thetford, with the aim of delivering real understanding and changes on the ground. This area encompasses a unique landscape in Britain with an incredible and much overlooked heritage and biodiversity. It has been selected to be a representative core of the whole Brecks area and contains the three main landscape character types of the Brecks, the two main population centres, and the greatest concentration of heritage assets.

See www.brecks.org for more information.



Timber Jills



Horse Logging

I recently attended a horse logging demonstration at Greenlaw in the Scottish borders. I didn't know what to expect and thought it would be simple log dragging extraction.



It couldn't have been more different. Thinning was taking place in a YC 22 SS plantation that had been turf planted so the ground was flat. This made horse extraction on a purpose built forwarder trailer very efficient. It had a small donkey engine that powered a grapple loader while, in a change of mode, it could also power a ridged drive wheel that fitted within the trailer bogie. This could be engaged when the horse was extracting the forwarder trailer up hill and could give a helping boost!



After thinning, the logs were stacked in small bings. The horse pulled the forwarder between the planted rows and rack removal was not necessary. Care had to be taken with the brash not to impede easy horse movements.

The horse stood patiently while each log bing was loaded, then with a gentle command, moved to the next bing. It was not at all fazed by the appreciative crowd and the noise of the donkey engine. The horse drew the loaded forwarder trailer outside the plantation to a stacking point on a farm road.



The owner felt that this form of extraction was very suitable for the silviculture of his woods. If a larger machine had been used, one row in five would have to be cut to allow extraction. This would have removed arbitrarily 20% of the best trees. This method retained all the best trees which improved the whole stand. When compared with any other form of mechanical extraction, there was almost no ground damage.

More information is available on www.britishhorseloggers.org while Google has a wide range of related sites and pictures.



Some Reminiscences of a Forestry School Student

by Simon Malone

Simon's story continues from his early days as a forest worker which was in the Spring issue. Ed

After four years practical work in Alice Holt forest I learned, early in 1965, that I had been allocated a place at the Forest of Dean Forester Training School (FTS), and would start there in September 1965. In preparation for this, in the spring of 1965 the FC sent me on a six-week pre-training school course at Newton Rigg, in Cumberland. This took place at an agricultural college operated by Northumberland County Council and forestry courses were only a small part of their overall agricultural training activities. The object of the course was to give us a bit of a jolt back into academic life after several years where signing for your weekly pay packet was the closest many of us had been to class work! I thoroughly enjoyed the experience, as it was my first academic work after the four years I had spent at Alice Holt.



It wasn't all work and we learnt to ski and accomplished the ascent of Saddleback as well! I worked hard for the six weeks and came through third out of some twenty or so other lads. I was determined not to waste this opportunity. I think some of my colleagues felt it was rather a waste of time but for me it was a bit of a wake-up call and reminded me of the coming classroom work just ahead.



The Dean Forestry School opened in 1904, some years before the Forestry Commission came into being and the building which was to become the training school for so many foresters over the years was converted from a disused mine building in 1910 for the Office of Woods. The school motto was "Sic vos non vobis", "Not for ourselves but for others". It closed in 1971 when the FC stopped in-house training.



Dean blazer badge - old style on right

All too soon the summer of '65 came and went and I packed up what belongings I had and bundled them into an old tin trunk purchased for a few shillings from a local bric-a-brac shop. This trunk, which was later to become the toy trunk for my children and is still used as such by my grandson, was loaded on to the train to be sent on to the forestry school.

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Some Reminiscences of a Forestry School Student *continued*

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I said my goodbyes to Chris, my fiancée and, I suppose somewhat selfishly, went off to start the two years training without giving too much thought to how long that must seem to her. I had not expected to see her during term times but once at the school it became clear that many people went home at weekends, some by car, but most by thumbing lifts.



After a few weeks I decided to give this method a try. The best place to start seemed to be the ring road around Gloucester city. It was fairly easy to scrounge a lift with one of the other lads to this starting point as a few of them with cars had to travel via Gloucester. The Severn Bridge did not open until late 1966.

From the ring road, it was not too hard to get a lift and it was helped if you demonstrated you were a student by wearing the green and yellow striped school scarf! However, getting to Farnham was rather a cross country route and I found I usually had to make a series of dog-legs to get there.

Typically I would get a lift along the A40 to Oxford, (fairly easy), and then to Newbury, (again not too hard), and then try to get either to Basingstoke or Reading. From either of these places I could expect to get to Farnham by bus if I got there early enough in the evening or after a long wait I would eventually find someone to get me to Farnham by car but it was never easy.

The return journey on Sunday evenings followed the same route usually, though I always started by bus going from Aldershot to Basingstoke or Reading as the most reliable method of reaching my primary route. Usually the closest you could expect to get a lift to the school was to Lydney on the A48. Many's the time I walked the four miles up to Parkend at

midnight to get back to the school without being passed by a single car! All of this meant quite a short stay at Farnham.

I suppose on average I thumbed to Farnham every two or three weeks in the first year, rain or shine!

The first memorable experience at the school was my 21st birthday in the December after I started and which, my fellow students promised me, would be an evening to remember. It may have been for them but I can only remember the first half of the evening in the New Inn at Parkend. After several large rum and blacks and similar pints of beer I was out for the count and woke up back in my "pit" feeling like death the next day! It was the same for all those lads who had a birthday at the school especially their 21st one. In fact dear old Mike Stone was returned to school prostrate in a wheelbarrow and spent the next day while we were working in the forest recovering hidden out of sight under a tarpaulin!

During the first year at the school we were taught to drive and one by one we set off in the local instructor's Austin A40 to be taught. After we had reached a basic level, and at the school instructors say so, we were allowed to use the school's three gear Ford Prefect for further practice in the evenings and at weekends, going out with a senior who already held a licence.

I duly took my test in Monmouth in spring 1966 and passed first time. The test proved easy for me as Monmouth was grid-locked with traffic at the time and I spent most of the test moving forward a few car lengths at a time, remembering correct use of hand brake and gear shifts as I went! I think about eight of us passed first time that day with only one poor soul who failed and had to endure some fairly ribald comments from the rest of us on the way back to the school!

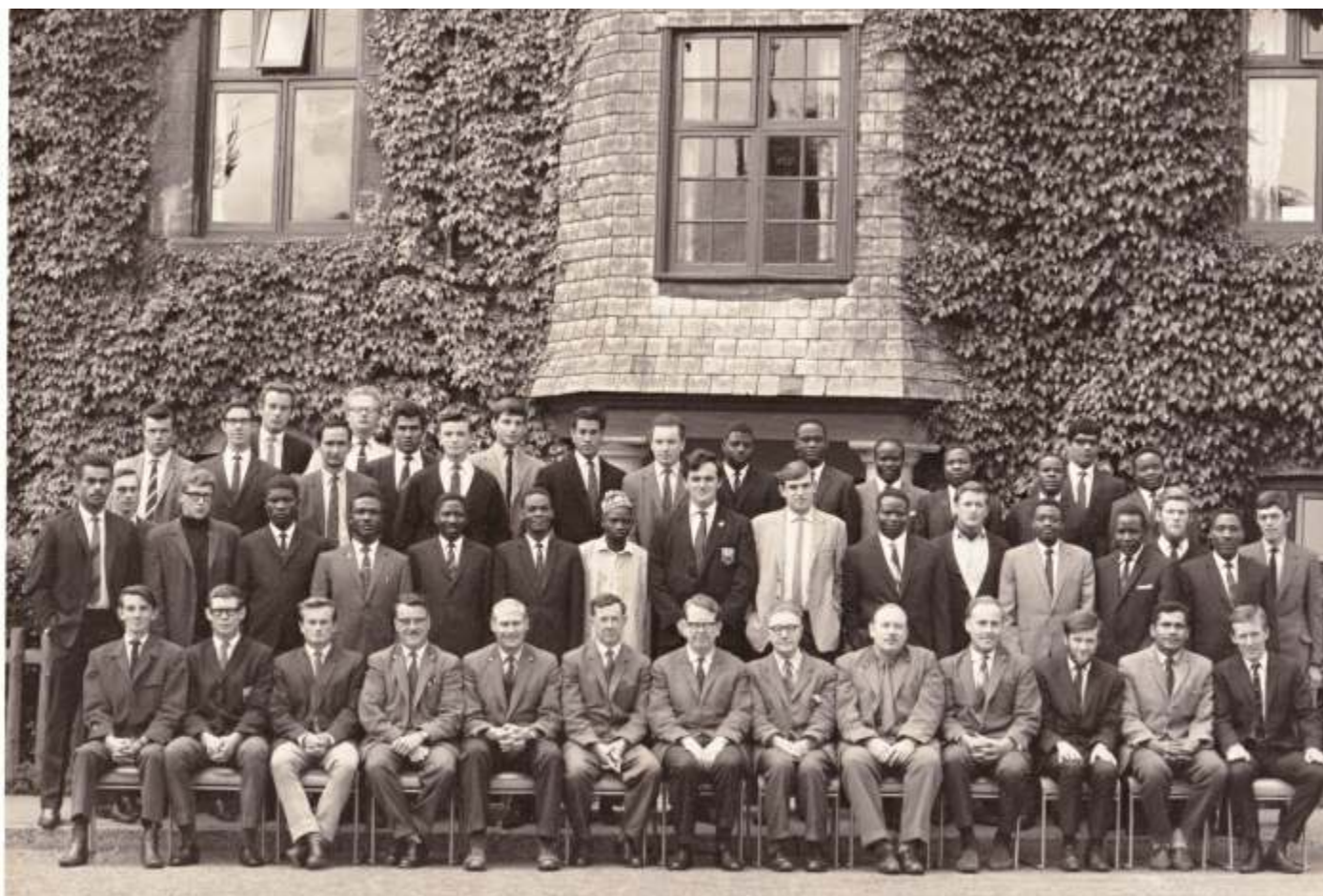
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Some Reminiscences of a Forestry School Student *continued*

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Now that I could drive I resolved to get a car as I was fed up with hitching lifts everywhere. I ended up buying a 1961 Morris Minor as my first car. It was a two-door model in pale blue, registration 944UPB, and cost £240.00. I purchased it from a garage in Farnham and by chance the immediately previous owner was the son of Sid Sawkins who had been a tractor driver at Alice Holt forest when I worked there. This little car was a real success and I eventually had it for over four years with very little trouble. It made the fortnightly trips to Farnham much easier.

I remember soon after I bought the car I was driving to Farnham one Friday evening when the brakes failed. I drove from Newbury to Farnham on the hand-brake and by furiously pumping the pedal to get some foot-brake power! Fortunately the garage which had sold me the car replaced the master cylinder under guarantee on the Saturday morning.



School photo July 1966 – author seated front row second from left. The Forester Instructors, also seated, centre L to R are Derek Davies, Geoff Waygood, Tony Joslin, John Goodwin, Harold Jones, Roger Twallin, John Niles.

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Some Reminiscences of a Forestry School Student *continued*

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Life as a student was a mixture of classroom learning supported by practical work outside "on the hill". We spent about half the time working in the forest, taking it in turn to act as gangers for a small squad of fellow students and going through all the processes of site planning, costing and work measurement. Travel to work sites was in the back of a lorry driven by a local forest worker named Ted Newman who was permanently attached to the school. This was a flat bed Bedford lorry with a canvas tilt and bench seating down each side. There was always serious competition to be in the seats near the back where you could at least get some sort of view of the journey. We generally had a really good time and life was fairly light hearted in this period.



Even the classroom side of school was enjoyable, with desks carried outside for lessons in hot summer weather. There was a small games area next to the wooden lecture hut and between lessons we burnt off excess energy playing volleyball!

The instructors were all practical foresters and we were treated pretty much as responsible adults, (which we were for much of the time), and got on well with them all throughout.

The School Principle was John Goodwin, better known as "Drag" on account of his slow drawn



The mysteries of the Dumpy Level

out way of speaking. Other instructors were Welshman Derek Davies, Geoff Waygood, Roger Twallin, Tony Joslin and John Niles. Botany was taught by Harold Jones, a retired schoolmaster on a retainer to the school to teach just this subject. He was a lovely old boy who made the subject interesting and with his great knowledge he was a considerable help to us all. All the instructors were good men intent on giving us the best forestry education they could. Part of the curriculum involved visits to sawmills and wood using industries so we got out and about a couple of times each term, again mainly travelling in the back of the old lorry. Longer excursions to places like Alice Holt, for example, were usually undertaken in smaller vehicles like the school's Land Rover and Bedford Utilabus.

At the end of the first year we did a six-week exchange course with one of the other Forestry Schools. At this time the remaining FC schools were Gwydyr, Benmore and Faskally. On this occasion the Dean lads were sent to the school at Faskally House in Pitlochry, Perthshire. Here the regime seemed stricter; perhaps it was just that the instructors were not really prepared to get to know us for such a short period. Certainly the principle, an earthy Scotsman, Mr Tulloch, did not look upon an unruly bunch of

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Some Reminiscences of a Forestry School Student *continued*

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southerners with a friendly eye! However we all enjoyed the experience and the school was certainly an impressive baronial building standing by the edge of Loch Faskally and in its own private grounds.



During the six-week exchange our work was mainly outside with little in the way of lectures and we got to see a reasonable amount of central Scotland. Transport, as ever, was in the back of a lorry with a canvas tilt for cover. On one occasion we were going down a narrow lane and next minute the driver had lost control and the lorry was half on its side in the ditch! Fortunately no injuries and we all manhandled the wagon back onto the road again.

Four of us also spent a weekend travelling to the north of Scotland, including John O' Groats, as Dave White, one of my fellow students, had taken his Mini to this School with him.



One of the instructors was a man called Dave Solway and towards the end of our second year he transferred down to the Dean as an instructor there. The biggest concern was over the quality and quantity of the food which, compared to the excellent and plentiful food at the Dean, left a lot to be desired!



Gywdyr FTS and a weekend invasion by Dean students in 1966



1966 saw the second year at Forestry School and we were the senior year this time. I took on the role of treasurer of the Student Union which meant collecting the weekly subs., paying any bills such as the rental on the washing machine we had on hire purchase from Bon Marché in Gloucester and generally ensuring that we had enough funds for any

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Some Reminiscences of a Forestry School Student *continued*

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events we wished to run. I also had to produce a full set of financial accounts to be audited by the Principal of the school each term. Each year there was a six-month course of students from various Commonwealth African countries and although they signed up to the student union, and certainly took the benefits, extracting their weekly subs from them was never easy or pleasant. If I remember rightly we were paid an allowance of about £4.10s a week while we were at the school, being called into the Principal's office each Thursday to collect it. To put it into perspective petrol was about 3 shillings and sixpence a gallon at the time and a pint of cider at the Rising Sun, Moseley Green would cost about a shilling or 5p in today's money. I used to divvy up my pay into small amounts for clothes, car, petrol etc. much to the amusement of my colleagues who just let it flow away. I think this is why I was elected treasurer for the Student Union at the time!

As seniors we were on a rota to act as "Deputy Dog" every so often. This meant when it was your turn on the rota you acted as Manager-cum-Caretaker and had to stay on the premises all week, including weekends, not even going out to the pub. The duties were mainly to keep an eye on the school and its general security and report any faults needing repairs. The Deputy Dog was also responsible for ensuring the phone was answered in the evenings and at weekends. In the summer this was often to respond to reports of a forest fire and, as the school was on call to turn out assistance in the event of fires, to ensure the Land Rover and Utilabus were ready to use, fully fuelled and equipped with fire beaters and other tools. After the excitement of the fire it was the Deputy Dog's job to fill out the necessary Fire Report.

The Deputy Dog also took home one of the cooks who lived some way from the school on the one evening a week she worked late when

we had an evening botany lesson. The other duty was to ensure the Union Flag was raised on official occasions on the pole in front of the school, as the school was a government building. I also recall being on duty on the date when the authorities trialled an interim Census of population in 1966. This was based on a sample of households and as the school was part of the sample and I was on duty, I had the task of completing the return for the school.

One of the saddest events at the school was at Christmas 1966. We had a number of overseas students on our two year course who came from Malaysia, Mauritius, the Seychelles and Fiji. Two of the lads from Fiji were killed in a car crash while returning to the school in early January 1967, after the holiday. Seru and Kit had been much-liked students who got on with everyone and lived life riotously and to the full and were fully paid up members of the local rugby club. Kit was married and had a wife back in Fiji. Their families were unable to pay for them to be sent back home and so they were buried together in the churchyard at Parkend.

Their funeral was attended by a group of Fijian soldiers who were stationed at Church Crookham near Aldershot and who Seru and Kit had regularly visited. They sang a hymn in their native language and you did not have to understand the words not to be very moved by this. Also in the car with them was another Fijian, Matt, who was badly injured in the crash. He was in the junior year with us at the time and recovered to go on to complete his course.



Once a year the school held its annual dinner dance. This took place in February for some reason and was held at a hotel in Tintern in the nearby Wye valley.

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Some Reminiscences of a Forestry School Student *continued*

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My intended came to the dinner dances and one of the instructors made his house available for our girl friends to stay in. Tony Joslin was a bachelor at that time and lived fairly frugally. His house was very poorly heated so the girls were all absolutely frozen by the end of the night while we poor students went back to a nice warm Forestry School. As you can see proprieties were observed at all times!



Students relaxing at an FTS v Parkend cricket match and enjoying a summer's afternoon sing song



1966 rolled on to 1967 and the prospect of our final exams was looming. I had kept in the top three or four in all the term exams so far and continued to work hard at the school. We had really good instructors. All were foresters doing

a tour of duty at the school and passionate to help us all to achieve our Forester's Certificate without which employment as a forester with the FC would not be possible.

We sat our final exams in June 1967 and all the effort of the two previous years was about to be tested. The exams were partly written and partly practical spread over about a week, I think. I felt fairly comfortable afterwards but, of course, we all had to endure the inevitable wait for the results. I also sat the Forester's Certificate exam for the Royal Forestry Society. This had little extra value but as the course work for the FC exam was similar most of us had a crack at the RFS exam. I took the written part of the RFS exam in the Forestry School and the practical was held on the Windsor estate later in the year and after I had started working as a forester in Kent. With the help of Instructor John Niles most of us also sat a Timber Technology exam for the National Institution of Wood Science. Study for this was evening work held in Lydney Grammar school once a week.

To ease the wait after the exams Derek Davies, our instructor, who came from North Wales, arranged for us all to spend two weeks working in Dovey Forest where we stayed in two large log cabins normally used by Outward Bound adventure groups. We had to do a full day's work in the spruce plantations and at the time line-thinning had just come into fashion so we set to carrying out a first thinning in the Sitka Spruce using various combinations of line thinning patterns as a trial. We were all pretty relaxed after the exams and had a really good time. A rota was drawn up so that for each cabin a student spent the day catering for all his fellow students. This meant going into Machynlleth with Derek Davies in the morning to buy the necessary food to cook the meal of our choice for our colleagues when they came back to the cabin in the evening. For my slot on the rota I chose to cook liver and bacon with a trifle for pudding. It all got eaten so I must

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Some Reminiscences of a Forestry School Student *continued*

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judge it a success although I think most people were so tired and hungry after a day's work that they would have eaten anything.

While we were in Dovey we got our final exam results and most of us got news of our postings to our first forests as fully-fledged foresters. Thankfully I had passed all the exams and was also pleased to find I had been posted to South East England Conservancy, as it then was, to Challock Forest in Kent. I was also pleased to see that a house had been allocated because

in those days most foresters lived in FC housing. This was good news because Chris and I were to get married in July after the term ended and prior to taking up this first posting. The house was Park Villa close to the village of Stelling Minnis near Canterbury.

So I parted company with the lads who I had shared my life with for two years, packed the worldly goods back into the famous tin trunk and loaded up the car for the final trip back to Farnham, marriage and an entirely new way of life.



1992 and a Dean 25 year reunion group

See forestry photographs and articles on the website www.forestry-memories.org.uk

LIFE IN BRIEF

David Williams tells of **RALPH WAINWRIGHT** who died in May 2015 at the age of 96. Ralph was born in Runcorn in 1918. Following active service throughout WW2, he was a FC Forester for the best part of forty years, based at various locations including Dyfnant, Coed Sarnau and Mathrafal.

After retirement in 1979 he played a major role in the management of private estate woodlands in NE and mid Wales for more than twenty years, and was widely respected for his depth of knowledge and experience from nursery to sawmill. His lifespan from 1918 to 2015 encompassed the entire life of the FC in Wales, namely 1919 to 2013, surely a remarkably if not unique occurrence.

An outspoken yet modest man, he said more than once to me that he had been lucky, but without going into details. This may well have been based firstly on his survival as an infant of the influenza epidemic, which swept Europe and beyond in the year following WW1, killing far more than total deaths on all sides in that war, and secondly, as an explosives specialist using skills acquired with ICI Runcorn, he served in North Africa, Sicily, mainland Italy and Germany. There he lost many colleagues, some due to dealing with booby-trapped ammunition dumps abandoned by retreating Axis forces. During the final advance through Germany he witnessed the horrors in the recently-liberated Belsen concentration camp.

Ralph had numerous friends, as was borne out by the packed church at his funeral.

Dorothy Munn has told me that **CLIFF FEATHERSTONE** died in December 2014 aged 92. Cliff's fulfilling and compelling career was published in FCA Today issue 50 Winter 2013 in an article entitled *Arctic Star Award*. Readers will recall that he received this award as a veteran of the WW2 convoys to Murmansk.

He went to Dean FTS in 1946, the first entry after the war. He then held forester posts in the NYM, went to Kielder as chief forester in 1972 then finally moved to and subsequently retired from Thetford in 1987. You can read his own words in issue 50.

GORONWY WYN JONES has died at the age of 86.

Goronwy spent all his working life in the Forestry Commission, with his career concentrated in his native mid-Wales. He started at Corris Forest, transferred to Rheidol Forest as a leading ganger, where he was promoted to Forester.

After a further promotion to Head Forester he took charge of Dyfnant Forest, then moved on to Ystwyth and subsequently returned to Rheidol Forest as Head Forester i/c.

Following the re-organisation in 1984 he became Management Forester for Aberystwyth District, where he remained until retirement.

A resident in Talybont since 1980, he was well known locally, was actively involved in community life, took an interest in the Horticultural and Agricultural Shows, and was a member of the Aberystwyth Male Voice Choir.

Goronwy leaves a widow, Tegwen, and their three

daughters, together with their families.
John Roe

VERONICA MacKENZIE died aged 85 at Inverness in May 2015. Vera, as she was affectionately known throughout the FC, ran the Work Study, Education & Training office at Smithton near Inverness for some 23 years before retiring in 1995. She and her husband were keen supporters of the North Scotland FCA group.

Roderick Leslie remembers the life of **OLIVER LUCAS** who died this year aged 67. Oliver was the author of *The Design of Forest Landscapes* published in 1991. After a plant science degree at Nottingham, he completed a forestry MSc at Oxford and joined the FC at Aberystwyth.

Following Dame Sylvia Crow's development of forest landscape practice, Oliver, together with Duncan Campbell and Simon Bell, was one of the three forest officers to complete a further degree in landscape architecture. Many will remember their multifaceted presentations.

Oliver went on to become forest manager in Dorset where, with Andy Frost, he developed the Moors Valley Play Trail as part of the Moors Valley Country Park. 25 years on it is still delighting children. Together with the late Roger McKinley, he also led the FC's first heathland restoration programme. After district amalgamation he moved on to the Devon & Cornwall peninsula as Head of Planning where he led the Neroche and Haldon projects. In retirement he turned his artistic talents to painting.

FCA Today on Facebook

by Ian Blake



I have set up a FCA Today Facebook page. Those with an account can search for FCA Today to become a member. If you don't have an account, I recommend you access the site shown below to set one up.

Simply follow the steps shown - they are quite straightforward. Once you're signed up, search for the FCA Today group to become a member, then you can disseminate information as and when you like.

Alternatively, there are a myriad of sites to assist in setting up Facebook, if you don't like this one, just type 'How to set up a Facebook account' into your browser.

<http://m.wikihow.com/Set-up-a-Facebook-Account>

Forestry Commission Association Organisers

FCA Liaison Officer: *Charles Dickens*

e-mail Group membership enquiries to: -

FCA Today editor: *Richard Toleman*

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FCA Today Magazine

The next issue of the FCA Today magazine will be available on the www.fca-today.com website on **5th December 2015**.

Articles for inclusion in the next issue of the magazine should be sent to the editor before 1st November 2015.

The publication dates of the FCA Today magazine are: - **Spring edition: 5th April, Summer edition: 5th August and Winter edition: 5th December**

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

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,
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