

FCA Forest Forum



Spring 2022

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Articles

Farnham Walking Festivals

by Brian Greig

In May 2017 a Walking Festival was organised by Farnham Town Council with over 30 walks around the town and in the local area. They ranged from less than a mile to 12 miles and all were free of charge. The Festival was so successful that it was repeated in the following two years.



Pair of Oriental Spruce at the Entrance to the Alice Holt Arboretum

In 2020 a more ambitious Festival was planned with over 60 walks, but unfortunately due to Covid it had to be cancelled.

As part of the Festival I arranged three guided tree walks. One was around a residential housing estate in the village of Rowledge. It had been built in the 1980s in the grounds of a large house which the Planning Authorities imposed TPO's on 61 trees of 24 different species. The second was around the grounds of the Alice Holt Research Station. It followed a tree walk which featured 30 notable trees, some of which were rare specimens and others that were planted when Alice Holt Lodge was a

private residence. The third walk, that is the subject of this note, was the little known Alice Holt arboretum.

The arboretum was originally set up in the 1950s as a fenced research enclosure for testing the suitability of trees for forestry. The research focused on a range of conifers and broadleaved species like alders, beech and hickory. By the mid 1970s, many of the experiments had finished, leaving behind an interesting variety of trees. The area was developed as an arboretum for recreation with picnic tables and a network of paths. Over recent years it has been restored with the paths being repaired, the removal of overcrowded trees, cataloguing the important specimens and planting the next generation of trees.

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Articles

Farnham Walking Festivals *continued*

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Volunteers from the Alice Holt Community Forum and the South Downs National Park Ranger Service are currently involved in its restoration and regeneration.

There is a trail through the arboretum with 30 numbered trees. It starts with an imposing pair of Oriental spruce, (*Picea orientalis*) and finishes with a rather shabby specimen of Dallimore's horse chestnut, (*Aesculus x dallimore*). Over time some of the original trees have succumbed to disease and these have not been replaced, although as in the case of Common beech, there are plenty of other examples nearby.

The full list of the original trees is below. All are individual specimens unless stated otherwise.

1. Oriental Spruce (*Picea orientalis*) - a pair of trees.
2. Sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*)
3. Hybrid larch (*Larix x marschlinsii*)
4. Western red cedar (*Thuja plicata*)
5. Common beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) - felled.
6. Rauli - Southern beech (*Nothofagus alpina*)
7. Roble - Southern beech (*Nothofagus obliqua*)
8. Lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta* var *latifolia*)
9. Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) one of a group.
10. Coast redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*) A magnificence grove of majestic trees planted as rooted cuttings in 1954. One can imagine being in California when standing among these.
11. Leyland cypress (*Cupressus leylandii*) A group of almost 70 year old huge trees which show the potential of the species if left unchecked.
12. Italian alder (*Alnus cordata*)
13. Monterey cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*) A species that is one of the hybrid Leyland cypress.
14. Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) A specimen illustrating the fine form of the species as a timber tree.

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Articles

Farnham Walking Festivals *continued*

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15. Dawn redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*) A small grove which was planted as rooted cuttings taken from a tree raised from one of the earliest batches of seeds collected in the wild. It is rare to see dawn redwood planted as a group, rather than as single ornamental trees.
16. Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis*) A few trees planted in 1954 which show the growth potential of the species, even on a low rainfall site in southern England. The most important commercially grown conifer species in Britain.
17. Shagbark hickory (*Carya ovata*)
18. Coast redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*) This specimen is larger than any of the trees in the grove.
19. Giant sequoia, Wellingtonia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) A very impressive single specimen.
20. Yew (*Taxus baccata*) A 500 year old tree remaining from the oak woodland that was on the site before clearance for the research plots.
21. Scrub pine (*Pinus virginiana*)
22. Weymouth pine (*Pinus strobus*) now felled.
23. Western white pine (*Pinus monticola*)
24. Armand's pine (*Pinus armandii*)
25. Pitch pine (*Pinus rigida*)
26. Gregg's pine (*Pinus greggii*)
27. Jeffrey pine (*Pinus jeffreyi*)
28. Ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*)
29. Leyland cypress (*Cupressus leylandii*)
30. Dallimore's horse-chestnut (*Aesculus x dallimorei*)

Most of the information above is taken from the Alice Holt Arboretum Tree Trail Guide, which used to be available for visitors at the entrance to the arboretum. Unfortunately this is now out of print and needs updating. It is hoped that a new edition will be produced shortly.

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Farnham Walking Festivals *continued*

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Articles

Gwydyr Football Team - The Champions?

by John Brian Griffiths



The photo is that of the Gwydyr intake of 1959-61 football team which played in the local league, more than holding our own.

Back row: Left to right, Tom Robinson, Bob Matthews, Dick Knotts, John Lilley and John Robertson.

Front row: Gus Drew, Tom Daley, John Griffiths (me) and Dai King. For some reason, two are missing, but they would have been Bobby Howes and Don Price.

Don was a fine footballer, but an even better rugby player. He was a first choice outside half for Abertillery, a first class rugby team in South Wales in those days. Of those in the photograph, I don't know if any would be among readers now. Four were students sent from the Northern Ireland Forest Service, one left the FC soon after leaving Gwydyr, one went abroad and one sadly died at quite an early age.

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Articles

Gwydyr Football Team - The Champions? *Continued*

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I stayed with FC, and spent nearly all my working life in South Wales. It was a very difficult area to establish forests, mainly because of fire, sheep trespass and quite a bit of public opposition. The latter came to a head in the seventies when the then local mayoress called a public meeting in order to stop the planting of an area in the Rhondda Valley. She succeeded, even though it was promised that 30% would be left unplanted and used to encourage public access and recreation. This is now covered with wind turbines, with the resultant curbs to public access!

I still live in the area and frequently visit a forest which is some 8 miles from there and which is immensely popular with local visitors. Natural Resources Wales (NRW) is not too popular with former Welsh foresters, but I have to compliment it on its success in keeping out the undesirables, motor bikes etc, from the forests. Finally, a word about myself. Some of your Welsh readers may remember me for my snooker prowess. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their sponsorship and support when I represented Wales at the World Amateur Snooker Championship in Invercargill, NZ in 1986 where I managed to reach the Quarter finals.

NB. John was awarded the OBE on his retirement in 1996 for services to forestry - notably he was appointed as the 1st Community Forester in the FC, based in the Rhondda Valley.

Do you have any articles for the Forest Forum?

Send your articles to the editor

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

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





Articles

On Having the Sack

by Eric Rogers

For eighteen months, in the late 1940s, before National Service, I was a trainee forester on a North Hertfordshire private estate. An essential piece of gear carried by all staff was a sack. A real, brown, potato sack, about two foot wide by four foot long. No metrication in those days. A length of binder twine was secured tightly to one of the bottom corners and there we had one of the most useful and versatile pieces of equipment known to man!



Setting out from home in the morning, for my five or seven mile bike ride to work, the sack was slung across my shoulder and tied around the mouth. It carried my bottle of cold tea or, in winter, a vacuum flask bought with a special Agricultural Worker's permit and cheese sandwiches, for which my mother received extra ration coupons.

When I arrived at the wood yard an axe and billhook might be added to the sack, or it might be used to wrap around the blade of a six foot cross cut saw, so that it could be safely carried over the shoulder.

Courtesy of Robert Bruce and Forestry Memories
<https://www.forestry-memories.org.uk/>

First job at the work site was to get a fire going, often with the embers from the previous day, either to burn up branchwood, or ready for lunch breaks. Then the sack would be used to kneel on when using the saw, to fell trees, or as a shoulder pad when carrying logs out. Often we carried fifteen foot logs with a diameter up to 12 inches and, even with four men, the weight would give today's Health and Safety Inspectors apoplexy. Come the lunch breaks, we would sit around the fire with our sack on a springy heap of spruce branches toasting our sandwiches. I have fond memories of those breaks.

We didn't use tractors in the woods, it was all horse extraction. But if drafted to the farms at harvest time, the sack made a comfortable cushion on the old metal seats which, although well crafted to the human posterior, were jolly hard, and cold.

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Articles

On Having the Sack *Continued*

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During really bad weather, or if special orders were required, we worked under cover in the wood yard cutting out planks or firewood, or splitting kindling wood for the Manor. The sack would then be used as an apron, or tied around the waist, to keep the dirt and resin off our clothes and as a pad when pushing logs into the saw. I learnt a lot about identifying timber while working in the wood yard. I can still identify many by the smell alone.

When the snow and rain came and we were working outside, one corner of the sack was pushed into the other and it was worn over the head like a pixie hood to keep head, shoulders and back dry. If the rain was too heavy, the sack would be laid across a whorl of spruce or pine branches and we would stand underneath, close enough to the fire to keep warm.

When the day's work was nearly done, I would saw up a few logs or split some kindling to take home and, once a week there would be a rabbit, for which I paid the keeper the sum of six pence, to take home. A useful addition to the meat ration.

I doubt if there has ever been a more useful and versatile piece of equipment than my old hessian sack.

Tulliallan Nursery. Sacks are used to kneel on and can be seen on the ground and hanging on the fence with the jackets.



Courtesy of Will Anderson and Forestry Memories
<https://www.forestry-memories.org.uk/>



Letters to the Editor

Dear Richard,

May I add a few additional notes to Simon Malone's article "Alice Holt - A Crown Forest". In our local newspaper, the Farnham Herald, there is a weekly section on local history and events called "Peeps into the Past". Earlier last year, a photograph appeared in the paper of the sign shown in Simon's article asking readers of its location. Several people responded, myself included as I knew it was on the wall of Keepers Cottage by the Rowledge entrance to the forest and adjacent to St. James Church and the vicarage. My wife and I spent our first six months of married life in a caravan just behind Keepers Cottage, as a promised offer of a FC house was withdrawn a couple of weeks before our wedding, so we knew the site well. This was during the notoriously bitter winter of 1962/3, but that's another story!

Keepers Cottage was sold by the FC in the 1980s. It has been unoccupied for several years and is now in a sad, derelict condition. The cottage was sold at auction in July 2021 for £612,000, presumably it will be demolished and 2 to 4 houses will be built on the site.



There has been considerable speculation as to the whereabouts of the sign that used to be attached to the wall of Keepers Cottage which Simon researched and is shown in his article. In a further note in the Farnham Herald "Peeps into the Past", Jennie Awdry, Simon Malone and I provided more information on Keepers Cottage and the sign, but its whereabouts remained a mystery. Imagine my surprise then, when at an auction house sale room in Itchen Stoke in Hampshire I spotted on the wall the sign, or at least an identical one, for sale at an estimated price of £300-£400. We can't be certain that this is the Keepers Cottage sign, as it is possible that there were similar signs elsewhere in the forest, but I am trying to find more information on its origin and history.

Best wishes,
Bran Greig.



Lives in Brief

Charlie Taylor told me that **MIKE** (or Mick) **CHEESEWRIGHT** passed away last November aged 82. Born into a farming family in Leicestershire, he chose a career in forestry and started work at Fineshade in Northants. His fledging career was interrupted by a period of national service, appropriately with the Sherwood Foresters. Hoping for some foreign adventures, he only got as far as Derby. Afterwards he attended Faskally Forestry School, near Pitlochry, from 1961-63 when he also met his wife, Irene.

Joining the Forestry Commission, the young couple were soon on the move to Norfolk, first to Holt and then to Brandon Depot where he was in charge of the pit prop production yard for FC's only sawmill at Thetford. Together with their growing family, they next moved to Kielder, working on the introduction of mechanised harvesting to FC forests. Then he went on to Scotland for tours of duty in Tornashean (Strathdon) and Banchory, where he was Technical Training Head Forester. His next move was to Newton Stewart before his "final tour" with the FC at Dunkeld, Perthshire where he was district forester in charge of harvesting and marketing.

For a man whose enthusiasm and energy meant that he "wound up to his retirement", it was no great surprise that, shortly afterwards, he then took on the role of site manager for the famous Enchanted Forest. This proved a pivotal role in smoothing the transition of this major event to being successfully run by the local community of Pitlochry, where Irene and Mike had settled on returning to Perthshire.



The famous Enchanted Forest at Faskally where Michael was site manager.

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Lives in Brief

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During his long association with Pitlochry, pre and post-retirement, Mike served on many local bodies and community organisations.

Too numerous to list here (over 25 in total!), but highlights included, chair of the community council, local housing association, church elder and heavy involvement in major local events such as



Michael shown first left during early years with the Forestry Commission.

the Highland Games and New Year Street party. It was fitting that this great effort, often behind the scenes, was recognised when he was named Pitlochry's Citizen of the Year in 2006.

Despite his passionate commitment to his profession and local community, his family always came first and he is sorely missed by Irene, three sons (Colin, Alan and Alister), daughter Linda and their families.



Mike reminiscing on Countryfile about his long association with Faskally Forest

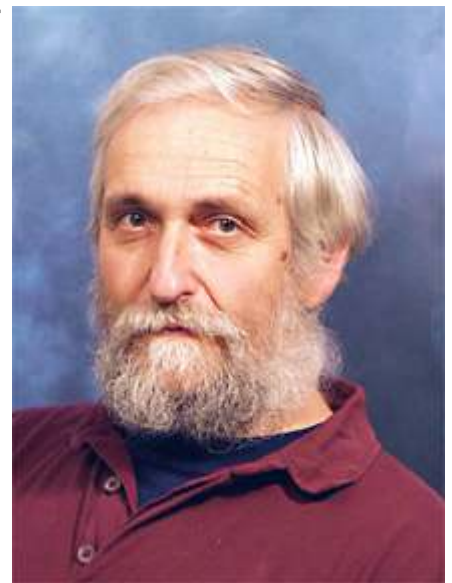


Lives in Brief

Alison Amer has told me of the sad passing of her Granddad **DON AMER** in January aged 91. He worked for the FC for 42 years and wrote up memories of his wide range of activities in FCA Today for the issues Spring and Summer 2018

Steve Lee and Alan Fletcher have put together memories of **C.J.A. SAMUEL**, known by friends and colleagues as Sam Samuel. He died at home on Boxing Day having suffered six months of ill health.

He made a significant contribution to forestry research in various capacities for over fifty years and only finally retired completely in May 2021. He joined the Statistics and Computing Branch at Alice Holt Research Station in 1970. Seven years later he transferred to the Genetics Branch and moved north to the Northern Research Station at the Bush Estate in Scotland. He was responsible for the statistical design of the Branch's field experiments and their subsequent analysis as well as the databases.



In 1996 he became Head of Tree Improvement Branch (previously Genetics) and was then in charge of provenance research and implementation of aspects of the Forest Reproductive Material Regulations (FRM).

In 2004, when a reorganisation of Forest Research took place and branches were disbanded, he moved over to the Centre for Forest Management and maintained responsibility for provenance and FRM. Two years later, on reaching the then retirement age of sixty, he was retained on extensions to continue work on provenance and FRM and to review and analyse data from the numerous provenance experiments. This resulted in the publication of bulletins on choice of Sitka spruce seed origins in 2007 and Douglas fir in 2010. He retired shortly after but undertook the contract for the inspection of all Forest Tree Nurseries to ensure compliance with the FRM Regulations.

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Lives in Brief

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The warmth and kindness he showed to his colleagues was widely recognised and greatly appreciated by all the staff whom he helped over his long career.

When Sam moved north he resided at Fountain-hall in the Scottish Borders. The property was a small holding at which he lived the 'good life', raising his four children, growing vegetables and keeping some animals with the help of his wife, Joanna. He was very good with his hands and applied his substantial skills to restoring agricultural vehicles and machinery as well as to various projects requiring electrical and plumbing knowledge. He was well integrated in the local community, serving for many years as the chairman of the community council. He was also active as a member of the local choir and in researching local history. Latterly, he planted up some of his ground with native tree species which will be a fitting memorial to Sam's interest in forestry.



Sam at Steve Lee's retirement lunch



Lives in Brief

Graham Hamilton told me of the sad news of the death of **ERNIE MICHIE** on 13th November in Inverness. He was 88.

Ernie was born in Dundee and graduated from Aberdeen University with a BSc (Forestry) in 1954. A period of national service followed which he served in the Royal Engineers and was commissioned. He joined the Forestry Commission in 1957 and was posted to Nottingham as Assistant District Officer.

About a year later he took over the Carlisle district and in 1963 he moved to Fort Augustus. His district was one of two run from the Fort Augustus office and included the forests to the west. He then moved to Inverness where he spent several years as Acquisitions Officer before taking over the Dornoch district in 1973.



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Lives in Brief

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His final move in 1983 was on promotion to the upgraded district centred on Castle Douglas. He returned to Dornoch on his retirement in 1989, but later moved to Inverness. To his FC colleagues Ernie was an immensely likeable individual, great company, an excellent manager and extremely modest.

To a much wider circle, he was an outstanding figure in international rugby. He was noticed first when he was a pupil at Aberdeen Grammar School and played in the first XV. He subsequently played for Aberdeen University. He got his first Scotland cap in 1954 against France at the age of 20 and went on to play another 14 times for Scotland. Notably he was in the Scottish team which ended a bleak period of 17 successive defeats by beating Wales in 1955. In that year he was selected for the British Lions tour of South Africa where he often piped the team on to the field. (He was a former member of the Aberdeen University pipe band). He played for other teams in his career, including Langholm, London Scottish, Leicester, the Army and Highland. He was also instrumental in establishing a rugby team in Sutherland when he was living in Dornoch.

Ernest James Stewart Michie will be sorely missed, and our sympathy goes to his wife Sybil and to his daughter Morag and sons Fergus and Iain, and to his grandchildren.

Send your Forest Forum articles, memories and letters to the editor.



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



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