



Small Woodland Owners' Group

Newsletter December 2015

Books for long dark evenings

Christmas day in the woods

A tree for Stony

New woodsman register

Small Woodland Owners' Group

www.swog.org.uk



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Season's greetings from all of us at SWOG to all of you, and special thanks to those of you who have sent in articles and stories during 2015. Rich has had a great idea for new SWOG forum groups. We have a couple of book reviews, a sure-fire guide to enjoying Christmas day in the woods and the tale of one Christmas tree, from one SWOG plantation to market place.

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The Small Woodland Owner's Group (SWOG) has been formed to aid the enjoyment, diversity and conservation of British woodland. The company Woodlands.co.uk sponsors the group, so membership is completely free and events are free of charge unless otherwise stated. SWOG is open to anyone interested in the management or the enjoyment of woodland.

Follow us on Twitter @_swog



SWOG COURSE LIST MARCH 2015



Courses are listed by location. You can search the lists by entering a key word.
Press CTRL F or CMD F (Mac users) and enter the search term.

SWOG Course Listings

We are often asked to recommend courses and have a list of those undertaken by owners on our website. Many new woodland owners study woodland-related topics ranging from basket-weaving, green woodworking or pole lathe turning, to chainsaw tuition and woodland management. The reviews provide a short resumé of each course, noting how effective participants found it, and whether

they would recommend it to others.

We regularly update this list of valuable comments, which is a database searchable by area or course topic. We hope it will be useful to anyone searching for help and guidance in choosing a woodland course. View it on the SWOG website here: www.swog.org.uk



Putting woodman into woods

The Sussex & Surrey Coppice Group have recently set up an online Wood Register in order to help woodman and landowners make contact with each other. Landowners often struggle to find woodman or contractors to cut and manage their woodlands, whilst woodman also struggle to locate owners locally to source their materials.

The service is completely free and you can register your woodland online. There is also a mobile app in development with push notifications.

The website lists both woodlands currently available and woodman looking for woodlands to cut. It mainly covers Sussex and Surrey, but the adjacent counties (Kent, Hampshire and London) are also listed.

Many wildlife trusts and large-scale woodland owners are signing up to use the service, but small woodland owners are also encouraged to list themselves if they are interested in actively managing their woodland. The woodlands do not have to be specifically coppice, as many woodman are also looking for timber and softwood.

The website has now recently gone live, so if you would like to register or to find out more then please visit the www.thewoodregister.co.uk or email Alan Sage at: enquiries@thewoodregister.co.uk

New-look Excellence in Forestry Awards head north

The Royal Forestry Society (RFS) Excellence in Forestry Awards are returning to the north of England for 2016, with awards reflecting contemporary challenges faced by woodlands large and small.

There is also a new and expanded Education and Learning Award for forestry education, training and career development.

As the 2016 awards open for entries, RFS Chief Executive Simon Lloyd says: 'We have revised the awards to focus on the responses of woodland owners and managers to today's complex challenges posed by pests, diseases, climate change and other environmental impacts.

'Our Duke of Cornwall Award now places a strong emphasis on resilience planning, the Silviculture Award on compartments that have been restocked or created in the past 30 years, while the importance of bringing woods back into management is recognised in a new Small and Farm Woodlands Award, and our Urban



and Community Forestry Award reflects a growing recognition of the value of trees to people in urban environments.'

The awards are open to all. For 2016 awards are being held in the areas covered by the RFS North Eastern, North Western [excluding the Isle of Man], and Yorkshire Divisions.

Full details of the awards and how to enter can be found at www.rfs.org.uk/awards/rfs-excellence-in-forestry-awards/. The deadline is Tuesday 8 March 2016 and an awards event for all winners will be held in July 2016.

For further details email competition organiser David Brackley at rfscompetition@btinternet.com

In future years, the awards will be held as follows:

2017 – East

2018 – West

2019 – South

2020 – Isle of Man, Northern Ireland and Wales

Setting up a dedicated forum for shared woodlands

Earlier on this year, there was a discussion on the SWOG forum about having a private or closed message board for certain groups of members (www.swog.org.uk/forum/viewtopic). It got a bit confused and convoluted as it became apparent that everyone had slightly different ideas about what its purpose should be and which members should have access to it. It's been on a bit of a low simmer ever since.

Just recently a couple of owners approached me regarding joint projects in their woodland. If a group of owners are trying to work together, a 'closed' forum for owners in the woodland might be an easier means of communication than endless round robin

emails with ccs and bccs and long threads.

In some divided woods, owners don't always know each other. This could be for many reasons: maybe the owners live a long way away and don't visit very often, or the geography is such that they never bump into each other. However, there are many good reasons to get to know your woodland neighbours, just as there are good reasons to get to know your 'neighbourhood' neighbours!

If you're not able to get to your wood for whatever reason, then a good communication system between owners could be invaluable. It could help in reporting a tree down across a shared track, a gate left open, vandalism or theft. Or maybe just to organise a get-together! *If you would like to use this facility, email rich@swog.org.uk and he will set it up.*

Research into generating income from woodlands

Do you feel able to generate income from your wood? How do you get to hear about good ideas for commercial return from your woodland? Christine Meadows, a research student at Plumpton College, would like your input.

Although the awareness of the benefits of woodland management are increasing, the changes in the woodland grant system mean that woodland owners sometimes face challenges in bringing woodlands into management in cost-effective ways. Forestry and Woodland Management student, Christine Meadows is herself a woodland owner in a shared PAWS woodland which is currently undergoing restoration. The project will look at best practice in the commercial aspects of bringing woods into management and

owners' experiences will become an important part of this research. The results of the project will be available in mid-2016.

Please take five minutes to complete the simple questionnaire on this link www.surveymonkey.com/r/7HWBVL7.

The questionnaire is very short, but the wider research itself will also look at best practice across the UK, Europe and the USA.



Disease recovery tree packs

The Woodland Trust has created tailored 'disease recovery tree packs' to help landowners respond to tree diseases and plant more resilient landscapes. They are available on a trial basis in Kent, Suffolk, Norfolk, East Sussex and Northumberland - the areas most affected by Chalara ash dieback. Each pack contains 45 trees from a mix of five native species and come with tailored advice on planting, which will differ according to the type and condition of the landscape they are being planted into. The packs also contain tree protection and stakes. The Woodland Trust will contribute two-thirds of the cost, meaning landowners pay a heavily subsidised rate of just £60.

If you are located outside the affected counties but would like to plant, help is still available through a variety of other tree planting schemes. Contact the Woodland Trust and tell them about your planting project. Once the scheme is approved, one of their advisers will meet with you to draw up a tailored planting design that works for you and your land. In



most cases, we will be able to supply you with all of your trees and protection for just 40% of the usual cost.

For more information, visit the **Woodland Trust website** or get in touch. Email plant@woodlandtrust.org.uk or phone 0330 333 5303.

Grant application support

Free, specialist support is now available from the Forestry Commission England (FCE) to help forestry businesses access Rural Development Programme (RDPE) funding.

The Forestry Commission is running a series of local events for forestry contractors and owner-producers to provide a detailed overview of the grants available via the Rural Development Programme for England and practical advice on how to apply.

There are two types:

- The 'pie and pint evenings' are an informal networking opportunity to discuss what grant schemes are available and your potential application. Pie and pint (or your choice of beverage) provided.
- The application masterclasses explain in detail

how to create the best possible grant application. Tea, coffee and biscuits are provided.

These events will also explain how some can access free, one-to-one advice from the Forestry Advisory Consortium England (FACE) on what the right technical solutions and best grant scheme is for your business.

To register, identify your local event from the list online and contact the area office organising it using the details provided. There will be a limited capacity at each event and so we encourage you to register as soon as possible to guarantee your place.

For a full list of these events around England from December until February go to www.forestry.gov.uk/other-RDPEevents. We will have more information about this in 2016.

Books for long winter evenings

Norwegian Wood: Chopping, Stacking and Drying Wood the Scandinavian Way Lars Mytting Quercus, £13.60 (Amazon)

It is no secret that Scandinavians love their firewood. A couple of years ago, when Norwegian TV broadcast a **12-hour programme on how to burn firewood**, one of the guests on the show was Lars Mytting the author of this book. The Norwegian edition *Hel Ved* (loosely translated as 'pure wood', Norwegian slang for 'salt of the earth' is all about the Norwegian love affair with firewood, and has sold over 230,000 copies. It is all about the Norwegian love affair with firewood. Someone clearly thought we could do with some advice, as the book has recently been translated into English.

I really enjoyed this book and I would thoroughly recommend getting a copy. I found it engaging, readable and, if nothing else, lovely dark winter evening escapism. I also learned some new stuff that, while it might not translate perfectly into a UK setting, could become very useful. I particularly liked the 'stoking from the top" method of fire lighting and look forward to trying it out.

The book itself is beautiful, full of pictures and by and large the translator has done a really good job. Instead of getting bogged down in waffle, *Norwegian Wood* cuts directly to the heart of the matter.

The content was very useful, but you do need to bear in mind that it is written for a Norwegian audience. This might not sound like much, but some techniques which don't really take place in the UK are described in detail, and some which do (coppicing for example) are glossed over very quickly. That said, this difference in focus meant that I learned some new things, and there really are some very useful elements in the book which I don't recall having

seen before. The book is far from nostalgic, and there is a clear indication that this sort of culture is still very much alive in Norway.

There were a couple of minor issues. Firstly, the book was clearly translated for an American audience. This is understandable, as it is probably far larger than our own, but it has led to some rather unhappy compromises. Units are an awkward fudge between metric, imperial and traditional units (like the 'cord'). I don't know how this will sit with a US audience, but I certainly had to stop regularly to work things out and visualise them.

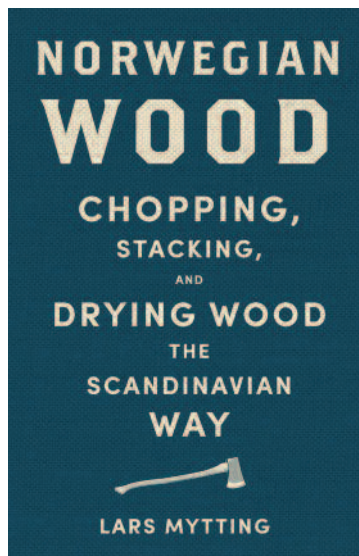
Temperatures, for example, are quoted in Fahrenheit and Centigrade in the text; this interrupts the flow and I think it could have been handled better by simply have adding additional units as footnotes. Secondly, there is an issue in translation of technical terms. I don't know whether this was because the translator was unfamiliar with them himself, or because it was assumed that the audience would be unfamiliar; but

there are a few translations in the book that are just wrong. For example, syrefelling (felling a tree and then leaving it with foliage still attached) is known in the UK as sour-felling, but it is translated in the book as 'leaf-felling', a term that I have never encountered.

Having said all of that, the book is basically great, and I would very much recommend that you get a copy. If you struggle to understand any of the terms, there are plenty of other books around that will set you straight, and *Norwegian Wood* is a great read in its own right.

Will Rolls

*(A longer version of this review appears on [Will's website here.](#)) Will is the author of *The Log Book – Getting the best from your Woodburning Stove* and co-author of *Getting Started in Your Own Wood.**



The Man who made things out of Trees

Robert Penn Particular Books, £11.55 (Amazon)

Rob Penn is a well known writer and broadcaster, and the owner of a small woodland in the Black Mountains. Many readers will remember his **Tales from the Wild Wood programme** which was broadcast on BBC4 a couple of years ago.

In 2012 Rob chose one ash tree, aged about 100 years old, and cut it down, vowing to use every last bit usefully. With an impressive straight stem of 6–7 metres, his tree was turned into a desk, paddles, hooks, wheels, arrows, stools and much more – in fact there were 44 different uses. Some of the brash was left to rot on the forest floor, nourishing the ecosystem from which the tree emerged. Inevitably, some of the smaller branches were used as firewood, but Rob's children quickly saw that his ash wood was special. 'Don't take the ash logs,' they told a neighbour, 'Dad's a bit weird about them'.

Ash is possibly the most useful hardwood species and the historic list of its uses is long. It is unique among tree species, being durable, light, flexible and strong, so for centuries throughout northern Europe this versatile timber provided tools, agricultural implements, household objects, weapons and tools.

Rob's story of 'his' ash's journey is both engaging and informative, and draws upon his arboreal knowledge as well as a well researched series of contacts. Rob did not make all the items himself – he supplied the wood and found the right people for the job. For two years he travelled across Britain and Europe, even to the USA, to harnesses the expertise of a great many craftsmen and masters of trades and cottage industries that are dying out. It is not a completely bucolic story about declining crafts, however. Many of the processes are made easier

by industrial machinery, but more often than not, they are overseen by people who have a lifetime's knowledge of wood and the properties of different timbers. Traditional craftsmen still survive, albeit in greatly reduced numbers, but every one of the wood workers within this book, whether they work with modern machines or traditional tools, create objects to last. Wooden wheels are built to last a century, axe handles a lifetime, tobaggons are designed to be handed down two generations, and the phrase 'built-in obsolescence' has no place here.



There is a rewarding amount of detail about the silvicultural properties of ash trees, how quickly they grow, why they have flourished so successfully and how they are distributed. Interspersed among the travelogue-style accounts of craftsmanship and manufacture, there are also pockets of scientific discussion about the physical properties of the wood itself, its strength, flexibility, resistance and endurance. Scientific advances have enabled this

generation to reinforce the folk knowledge of their ancestors and explain exactly why ash (and other timbers) perform as they do. The correlation between trees and human health is matched by the positive effects of using timber in public buildings – the result is a more engaged and happy populace and workforce.

Rob has succeeded in writing a book about ash trees without mentioning *chalara fraxinus* except in passing until the postscript – which makes a refreshing change. An index might have been useful, but this not a reference book.

A cultural and practical celebration of the mighty ash tree, this is a fascinating book and a really enjoyable read. It encompasses mythological and historical stories, scientific research, craftsmanship and the enduring human relationship with trees.

A Christmas tree for Stony

Every Christmas Trafalgar Square receives a fir tree from the people of Norway. Market Square in Stony Stratford has a tree from a little closer to home, courtesy of SWOG member Andy Malleson who fells one from his small plantation at Gayhurst.

Stony Stratford is a small market town on the northern edge of Milton Keynes and was once an important coaching town. One of Stony's great strengths is its community spirit, which is fostered by the town's businesses. During the Christmas season trees adorn all the shop fronts, but the biggest is erected in the old Market Square by a team of volunteers. Which is where Andy Malleson comes in.

Many woodland owners will have conifers in their woods and some may have small conifer plantations. Andy Malleson's wood includes a small, closely planted conifer plantation that should probably have been thinned 20 years ago. It's dark and forbidding, but at this time of year, it makes him a popular man.

The team from Stony enjoy their annual trip to the wood and choosing the tree is a matter of careful debate. Fortunately, Andy has a good selection away from the main plantation, which are well-shaped and of the right size. Several specimens were inspected, and the stems were measured to ensure the tree would fit the permanent hole in the Market Square.

Once selected, the pine was cut down by Andy and then came the tricky bit. At 8 or 9 metres high, it was a heavy tree, but the Stony team are well practised in tree extraction. With the trailer manoeuvred to within a metre or so of the felled tree, the lads then used brute force to drag it on board the trailer. Someone produced a sturdy old stump, which they wedged under the feathery point to stop the end dragging on the road.

Just when it all seemed to be over, shop owner David Odell, cleared his throat. 'Er, Andy,' he said. I think you said we could have another one for Odell's yard'. Andy raised his eyebrows, and led David over to the plantation. Andy explained that a tree from the edge of the plantation would do the job, as the top 5 or 6 metres had grown towards the light and had a good even spread. Down came another tree. This one was portable – as long as there was enough manpower on hand.

The annual tree-choosing trip sums up some of the best aspects of small woodland ownership. Andy uses the opportunity to manage his conifer and is gradually replacing those he cuts down with broadleaf; Stony Stratford gets a wonderful tree, and the community volunteers enjoy working in the wood.

Happy Christmas!



Woodlands Blogs

Changing moth populations

The condition of insect populations and species often reflect the state of wildlife in general. The Butterfly Conservation's national moth recording scheme offers a wonderfully detailed dataset of figures from 1970–2010.

How are owners and woodland managers responding to climate change?

Gabriel Hemery of the Sylva Foundation wants to know what's really happening in woodlands so he's been asking people – particularly about how they are responding to environmental change. The answers are extremely interesting.

Counting the trees

If this sounds like the kind of job you'd give a

bored child, stop and think for a moment how you'd assess the number of trees in the world. According to the magazine *Nature*, there are approximately 420 for each of us, or some 3 trillion across the Earth.

The birds and the bees, insecticides and wildlife

Evidence is accumulating to show that the decline in various bird species (sparrows, swallows and tree starlings) can be correlated with the use of insecticides.

Planting native bulbs within a woodland setting

Stuart battles brambles and hogweed to plant English bluebells, wood anemone and wild garlic – wish him luck!



Christmas– the magic of the season of peace in the woods



Christmas can be a very stressful time of year, but two SWOG members have discovered a wonderful way to celebrate. The secret is to keep things very simple. Forget about the shopping and the excesses of the season and take yourself off to your woodland, away from the TV and any other electrical diversion. Bernie and Theresa have kindly shared their formula for a very merry woodland Christmas.

Requirements

- Good company
- Good fire wood
- Good weather (optional)
- Good food
- Good wine

Not required

Radio/TV (unless you want the Queen's Speech)
Rain

Result: a quiet peaceful few days. Cooking ability is tested as you will need two or three fires on the go. It also helps if you're vegetarian!

