



STORIES FROM THE FOREST

Newsletter of the Forests in the Rural Community Project

2nd Edition -
November 2002

PROGRESS

We are very pleased to say that Jane Jones has now taken over as community co-ordinator for **Newborough** and would very much like to hear from anyone who has memories of the early days in Anglesey. Please phone Jane on 01248 353741.

In the New Year the project will be starting in **Pembrey Forest**, Carmarthenshire. Our community co-ordinator, Ruth Morgan, can be contacted on 01269 860454.

If you would like more information about the project please contact the project manager, Caroline Earwood 01691 671808. If you have questions about the forest today then your first point of contact is your local area manager.

Martin Gould (Newborough Forest) is based on Anglesey (07860 207807); Dave Farmery (Dyfi Forest) and Aled Thomas (Coed y Brenin) are based in Dolgellau (01341 422289); Mike Blud (Tywi Forest) is based in Llandovery (01550 720394); Andy Wills (Pembrey) is based at Resolven (01639 710221).

Due to the fantastic response we have had to the project we have applied for further funding to extend it to the other rural forests managed by Forest Enterprise.

EXHIBITION AT THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES

A display of The Story of the Forest will be opened by Mr Michael German OBE AM, Deputy First Minister, Minister for Rural Development and Wales Abroad on 12th November 2002 and will be open for viewing for 4 days. Thereafter it will be moved to other venues throughout Wales.

TYWI MOUNTAIN FOREST

It is now six months since the commencement of the project and people who have lived and worked in the area are providing a wide ranging perspective of life before, during and after the creation of the forest. There have been many interviews with senior foresters, forest workers and even schoolboys who worked in the forest during school holidays and of course people who lived in the area who were most affected by the forestry.

Through the generosity of these people we now have a varied collection of over 80 excellent photographs, an essay

about the people of Tywi mountain, a substantial retirement poem and a copy of an invitation to the opening ceremony of Llyn Brianne.

Mr Dafydd Davies, a former headmaster of Rhandirmwyn School provided an insight into the wildlife on the mountain prior to the forest and the building of Llyn Brianne dam. Mr Davies objected fiercely to the creation of the forest and was invited to become a member of a National Committee that oversaw the activity of the Forestry Commission. He said "I'm sure that was only done to shut me up, but they were interesting days".

Changes to Tywi mountain were brought about also by the building of Llyn Brianne dam, a subject that I look forward to pursuing in future months. It has already been said that despite the big money that could be earned on the dam project, not one forest worker left the forestry for the big money. It has also been said that during contractual discussions between the dam organisation and the Forestry Commission a clause was inserted in the contract that the "sanctity and peacefulness of the area was to be considered at all times".

Tom Jones 01970 880361 (Tywi Forest North)

THE "BURMA ROAD"

The main industry in Corris, Aberllefenni and Esgairgeiliog was the slate mines. Altogether there were approximately 50 workings in the area. There was even a narrow gauge railway which carried slate down from the quarries to the wharf on the other side of Machynlleth at Derwenlas.

In June 1947 the Aberllefenni quarrymen went on strike following a difference regarding wages. Approximately 70 men were without work. As there were no roads in the area the Forestry Commission commenced work on a scheme to link up the villages of Aberangell and Aberllefenni and most of the striking quarrymen found work on the roads.



Two bridges would be required for the new roads, one bridge for the Aberangell road and one for Cwm Celli, Aberllefenni. Bryneglwyn Quarry, Abergynolwyn, had also just shut and a lorry load of men from there would come every day to work on the bridge.

Mr. Edgington was in charge of the building of the Bailey Bridge. On the day that the bridge was being erected everyone had



their own jobs. Mr. M. O. Williams was responsible for putting bolts into the side of the bridge - a very tiring job, lifting and lowering his arms all day. After eight hours the first bridge was across. Locals used to go for walks to see the work being done and would come across a sign stating 'Burma Road' with the skull and crossbones.

Unfortunately today only the abutments remain of these once fine bridges. A reminder of when the forestry was there with work for the miners. What happened to the miners? Nearly all of them returned to working in the mine. They could not cope with work outside in the elements.
Meinir Coleman 01654 761624 (Dyfi Forest Corris)

"JOB VACANCY ON THE RANGES"

"The pay will be 40p per hour, plus 7.5 pence extra danger money, making a grand total of 47.5 pence per hour or £19.00 per week.



Occupational hazards: ploughing from inside an armour-plated cab, with a slit to see through, and no air conditioning. Uneven ground with a likelihood of overturning; very boggy ground with the likelihood of going under; and, one other small item, the ground will be peppered with live ammunition. Otherwise no problems."

The two men who were given the job were John Tudor Rees Jones, and Douglas Eric (Jock) McRobert. (These two men each received the British Empire Medal for their efforts.)

The shells that they were unearthing were from the First and Second World Wars. Some of these shells were very impressive, and John Tudor and Jock wanted one of them as a souvenir of their time at the Ranges. They found a beauty, with only the bottom blown out. But to get it away before the bomb disposal men found out, was another matter. A cunning plan was set up, they were to go on site very early the next morning, and between them carry their trophy up to the roadside. No mean feat, even though it was empty of explosives, it was full of peat, so to ease the burden they scraped away the peat with a crowbar. It was then that the bomb disposal sergeant caught them, and asked them what they thought they were doing. So they decided to come clean and admit that they wanted this shell as a souvenir. But the fear of being caught out, turned to a different fear, when the sergeant told them that the peat they were cleaning out was high explosives. They were told to go as far away as they could and wait. They felt the vibration under their feet before they heard the blast.

In Jock's words "You could put a cow into the hole that was left."

There was no more trophy hunting after that. Afterwards it was found out from the War Office, that the shell they had been playing with had been fired from a ship anchored at Cardigan Bay. It was designed to go through the outer shell of a boat and then explode inside, causing maximum damage.
Wil Jones 01766 831509. (Coed y Brenin North)

FROM FARM TO FOREST

The arrival of the Forestry Commission in the Dyfi Valley brought with it a transformation not only in the landscape, but also to the cultures and everyday lives of people who lived in communities throughout the valley.

To some the forestry meant a steady source of work and income. For others it meant better access roads to the land that they farmed or to their homes - places that had previously been inaccessible except by foot or horseback. Even the brand new fences built by the Commission made life easier for their new neighbours.

To others the coming of the forestry meant going from being tenants, with a free reign over the management of their holdings, to being Forestry Commission tenants, something which involved the heartbreaking process of watching trees being planted on fields and ffridds that they had long nurtured as agricultural land, in some cases for generations.

One such person is Morris J. Morris, who has been interviewed as part of the project in the Dyfi Valley. Morris J. Morris grew up in Pen Piner, which lies on the eastern side of the parish of Pennal. The house and buildings are now ruins and surrounded by conifers but Mr Morris has described in detail his childhood on the farm as it was and the transition from farm to forestry holding. He has been kind enough to allow us to use the following piece of poetry describing the changes to the area:

The Alien [translated from the Welsh]

*The dawn crimson of the bracken
Was over the wild slopes of Moel Goch,
And the mountain ash groves under their load
Above the ravines of Nant y Moch.
But the old community were scattered
The fair flock was given
As a sacrifice on the worthy altar
Of the coveting gods of the trees*

*A pure breeze from the ocean came,
The salt water on her lips
From the valley of Rhyd y Forwyn
And the sloping pastures of Gelli Grin.
But the old tradition was scattered
The old ways were erased
By the natives of far away Scandinavia
The region is under a green blanket*

*No more we'll see the shepherd
In Bwlch y Gwynt pass.
Ended is the charm of the square mile
That nurtured me in former days
And I hear the cry of the raven
That's cawed since before memory
Its harsh call clearly testifies
That an alien has the region.*

Morris J. Morris

Nick Fenwick 01654 702832 (Dyfi Forest South)



Mr Morris as a child at Pen Piner