



# STORIES FROM THE FOREST

1st Edition - August 2002

Newsletter of the Forests in the Rural Community Project

## FORESTS IN THE RURAL COMMUNITY

During the mid 20th century great changes occurred in the rural landscape of Wales. Some of these were tied to economic and social change which led to closure of quarries or a drift from farming. In some areas land was used for wartime installations. After the Second World War the Forestry Commission acquired much of this land and began the planting of the new forests of Wales.

The Forests in the Community Project was established by Forest Enterprise (Wales) in 2002 to record **The Story of the Forest**. We wish to capture the memories of local people and retired forestry staff and to store these for future generations by keeping copies in both the National Library of Wales and at local venues. Forest Enterprise is also seeking to encourage the participation of the local community in future use of the forest

If you have stories to tell please contact your local community co-ordinator whose name and telephone number is given after each article. The project is currently working in Corris and Pennal (Dyfi Forest) Trawsfynydd (Coed y Brenin) and Ystrad Fflur/Tregaron (Tywi Forest). If you would like more information about the project then please contact the project manager, Caroline Earwood, on 01691 671808.

If you have questions about the forest today then your first point of contact is your local area manager. Dave Farmery (Pennal and Corris) and Aled Thomas (Trawsfynydd) are based in Dolgellau (01341 422289). Mike Blud (Ystrad Fflur/Tregaron) is based in Llandovery (01550 720394).

## LIFE ON THE MOUNTAIN

Before Tywi forest was planted this was a vast, open mountainous area dotted with farms as far as three or four miles from each other, so neighbours were remote indeed. Their nearest village was either Pontrhydfendigaid or Tregaron. Their only means of transport was by foot, horseback or horse driven cart, and it meant a 20-25 mile round trip to get provisions. There was a track to Tregaron and the Roman Road led to Strata Florida.

Despite this remoteness there was a very strong and close community with the social interest revolving around horses and farm animal duties such as shearing and rounding up sheep on horseback. Hunting was also very much a social day. People visited each other's farms of an evening to play



cards, draughts and darts. This lack of amenities brought people together to form a loyal and trustworthy community. The creation of the forest, according to Peggy Jones, formerly of Maesglas Farm, brought good and bad. The good was the creation of the forestry roads enabling them to abandon to a large degree the use of the horse, and being able to access remote areas by Land Rover or Jeep. The bad was the splitting up of the community which was inevitable once people were able to go afar so much quicker and conveniently to other attractions.

Peggy tells the story of the opening of the Claerwen Dam in October 1952 when about 30 of the mountain people decided to go by horseback over the mountain to witness the ceremony. After the opening ceremony the Queen heard of the mountain people coming on horseback. She came to speak to them saying how she wished she had brought an old mackintosh with her so that she could ride with us on horseback over the mountains.

The story of life on the mountain gains a little more with each interview not to mention looking at some of the old photographs. If you have stories of the old days in Tywi please contact **Tom Jones on 01970 880361**.

## DID THEY GET DANGER MONEY?

Training camps and Trawsfynydd seem to go hand in hand since Roman times. The Romans had their training grounds at Tomen y Mur 'Heriri Mons' from the first century AD onwards. Here they practised with the ballista, an ancient military engine used in throwing large stones at the enemy. Then in 1903 the army came to Bryn Golau, and Cwm

Dolgain was used as a live ammunition artillery range. There was a great upheaval at this time for the local farmers. Every morning, from about seven, until eight at night they had to move while the bombardment was in progress. This went on for about two years. Then the army moved to Rhiw Goch and all the farmers involved were given notice to leave their farms permanently.

Then about the early 1960's the Forestry Commission took control of the land, with the intention of planting, but for one drawback. The whole area was riddled with live ordnance of every shape and size! The land was wet so it had to be ploughed before planting. The solution was simple armour-plated cabs on the bulldozer to tow the plough.

I am now in the process of finding out who were these men in armour? Are they are still about? I would like to record their time during this exercise, which must have been to say the least not very pleasant!

If you have stories about the armoured ploughs or these times in Trawsfynydd then please ring  
**Wil Jones on 01766 831509.**

## TIMES OF CHANGE IN CORRIS

When you think of Aberllefenni you only think of the quarries and the forests. At one time there were fifteen small holdings and one farm in the Aberllefenni Estate. These were Bluemaris, Blue Cottage, Fferm, Islwyn, Show Room, Glanrafon, two in Caecenau, Fronwen, Tanycoed, Machine, two at Garneddwen, Pandy and Bengrych. These small holdings were only allowed to be farmed by the tenants during the summer months. The life was hard as these men had only the summer months to grow and gather their hay. If the weather was bad then it could be October by the time they finished gathering the hay, sometimes even collecting it by candlelight. The whole village would assist with the hay. The men would cut it in the morning before going to work and their families would work it during the day. The men would come home from work and continue to cut the grass with a scythe. This tradition went back so far, it would take an Act of Parliament to change it. The tenants had to wait until the Forestry bought the Estate and the tenant at the farm moved.

Women worked in the forests during the war years. There was the Land's Army but there were also girls who were employed in the forestry. These women had to do the same work as the men. They planted trees, cleared rides and fire breaks and also had to cut down trees. Many of the Land Army Girls were lodging in the area. One woman was given a telling off when she was caught knitting in the wet weather shed during bad weather! It was these girls, allegedly, that started the fire at Penlan. This fire started on the Friday night in 1942 and spread over the mountain from Penlan to Fronfelen. Fire engines from Birkenhead and Birmingham attended this fire and the Army was also assisted. The men in the forest were called to help, some cycling up to Penlan on their bicycles from Corris and told to help put the fire out. They were cutting down trees to create breaks and beating at it the fire with their coats.

Finally, after a very long week the fire was beaten. Then came the task of replanting.

The Camp at Ceinws was the main centre for the forestry. There were fourteen houses there, the main office and the roads department. There was a Church and a Village Hall where you could go to play billiards or whist, There was also a Library. The Garage was also based here, with three mechanics and an assistant. There was a playground for the children. This was the nerve centre of the Dyfi Forest. Every morning and every evening it would be so busy. One resident of Haulfryn remembers a Boys School from Birmingham being evacuated to here. This was a very happy community. Sadly today all the facilities have gone and only two families remain - one family having been there for over fifty years.

There are so many more fascinating stories. If you have memories or photographs which you would like to be displayed and kept for prosperity in the Institute at Corris, please ring me, **Meinir Coleman, on 01654 761624**, and I will be very pleased to call.

## FOREST HOLDINGS IN PENNAL

Many interesting stories of life in and around Pennal before, during, and after the establishment of Dyfi Forest during the 1940s and 50s, are being recorded. Some of these may be unknown to the wider Pennal community and will be important in helping future generations understand how their community once was and how it came to be as it is now, both socially and geographically.

For instance Mr Morgan of Tywyll Nodwydd, the first farm to be bought by the Forestry Commission in the Pennal area, remembers moving there as a boy while much of the preparation and planting work was still taking place. He remembers the first trees being planted by the Land Army Girls - trees that are still standing to this day, although there are plans to fell them later on this year.

On Forestry holdings such as Tywyll Nodwydd men were expected to work for the Forestry Commission full time, with their rent for the holdings being deducted from their wages. The women were therefore responsible for the everyday running of the farms, except at busy times of the year such as the harvest, when the men were given special leave.

This system allowed many families, who might never otherwise have had the chance, to go into farming, and many tenants ended up buying their farms from the Commission. If you have stories of the old days in the Pennal area of Dyfi forest please contact  
**Nick Fenwick on 01654 702832.**

### Community Co-ordinator Contract in Newborough

Unfortunately Mair Davies, our community co-ordinator in Newborough, is no longer able to continue with the contract owing to personal reasons. We are therefore seeking someone to take over this role. If you are interested please telephone the project manager,  
**Caroline Earwood, on 01691 671808.**