

'From Woodland to Workshop'

Course Review

By Sharon Rodhouse

Introduction:

The first three-day Woodland Heritage **Woodland to Workshop** course was held in May 2008 at Whitney Sawmill near Hay-on-Wye, Herefordshire. It gave an overview of forest management and the operations and problems involved in growing trees of high timber quality, the defects to which logs can be prone, measurement, sawing and storage of logs and sawn timber, and an opportunity to discuss the problems facing smaller wood-using enterprises.

The course was the inspiration of Will Bullough, the owner of Whitney Sawmill, and Peter Goodwin, Chairman of Woodland Heritage. It was run for 12 participants, most of whom were wood users (e.g. furniture makers, sawmillers, timber buyers and a horse logger) rather than growers, though some of these were also present. The value of the interactions between the two groups proved a major part of the value of the course.

After an introduction by Susan Bell (Trustee of Woodland Heritage), Will Bullough and Gavin Munro set the scene and ran the course. Geraint Richards the Duchy of Cornwall's forester and Graham Taylor of Pryor and Rickett Silviculture led the day in the field at Aconbury wood, owned by the Duchy. Two evening lectures were given by Peter Harper of the Centre for Alternative Technology and Roger Venables, a Woodland Heritage Trustee, on the 'Renaissance of European Oak'.

Woodland

During visits to Will Bullough's wood, adjoining the sawmill and a full day at Aconbury, topics covered, demonstrated and discussed included:

- Tree species selection.
- Planting designs in relation to tree competition and the landscape
- Vegetation control.
- Pruning and cleaning.
- Thinning.
- Protection from grey squirrels and deer.
- The recognition of potentially valuable stems of oak.
- The importance and relevance of the British and Irish Hardwoods Improvement Programme's work.

Workshop

The workshop discussions and demonstrations took place at Whitney Sawmill. Will Bullough outlined the problems faced by smaller sawmill enterprises operating within tight profit margins. He emphasised the desirability of woodland owners selling small parcels of hardwood to enable them to bid successfully.

Topics covered included:

- Distinguishing between normal drying splits and shakes.
- Minimising damage caused by ambrosia beetles.
- Practice at identifying various kinds of damage and undesirable features of logs, including woodpecker damage, spiral grain and blue stain fungi and wide sapwood.
- Likely markets for unusual logs including curved stems, "pippy" oak, and ripple-grained sycamore.



- The merits of a portable sawmill (a Wood Mizer).
- Practice at measuring and calculating timber volumes both in the forest and the sawmill. The importance of accuracy and reliability was emphasised. The losses incurred when converting a log to planks were also discussed.
- Air drying.

There was agreement that the diversity of student's backgrounds contributed much to the course through their individual knowledge and experience. Both Gavin and Will were praised as being confident and interesting speakers, keen to impart their knowledge, encouraging student participation and questions in an informal and friendly atmosphere. Woodland Heritage will be running a second, similar, course in October 2008.



Will Bullough in his wood



Discussion in the sawmill yard



Measuring a log



Geraint Richards - the use of coppice



Graham Taylor demonstrating high pruning



Discussing tree improvement at Aconbury with Geraint Richards (left) and Graham Taylor (centre)



Lunch on Aconbury Hill fort



Wood Mizer



The complexities of volume conversion



Measuring



Will Bullough in the classroom



Students discussing the practice of sticking sawn wood



In the classroom

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