

SOUTH WEST FOREST – MONTHLY BRIEFING

June 2004

1. Events

- On 6 May, Ekos Consulting ran the second of two workshops at Cookworthy Forest Centre when another diverse group of people with a broad range of connections to the timber industry exchanged views on how to give more integrity to the industry.
 - The feedback has helped considerably in the development of the **Sustainable Timber Procurement Study** being finalized by Ekos this month. The study will now be presented to the Woodland Renaissance Partnership at its next meeting on 16 July.
- At the **Devon County Show**, South West Forest's Woodland Projects Officer, Jim White, gave a presentation at the CLA breakfast on behalf of the Forestry and Timber Association on the theme of "Forestry in Education".
 - Following an initial outing at the Devon County Show, the **Royal Cornwall Show** has given a further opportunity to use our new display boards which were produced during the winter to give a clearer and more informed message about the work of the South West Forest. It focuses on the range of services provided and the many partnerships joined to effect delivery.
- South West Forest were pleased to host a visit from **Paul Hill-Tout, Director of Forestry Commission (England)**, on 26 May. He saw evidence of the wide range of activities that South West Forest are engaged in including a Community Forest Project in Okehampton and children enjoying their Forest School experience near Wembworthy. He visited the Upcott Project, one of South West Forest's training venues, where Ben May showed him some imaginative uses of wood. In the afternoon we showed him the positive application of the Woodland Opportunities Strategy on a site surrounded by Culm Grassland where a New native Woodland is being created. Finally a visit to Roadford Lake showed him the site of our annual Woodfair and an exemplar for new woodlands being used to develop tourism through recreational use.
- **Woodland Initiatives Network** – David Rickwood attended a 2 day conference at Cambridge on 11 & 12 May. Speakers included Paul Hill-Tout warning of reduced FC funding for woodland initiatives in future. Richard Britton talked about the progress of Regional Forestry Frameworks. There was an interesting presentation on monitoring and evaluation followed by the launch of two new IT support networks and on line discussion forums for the initiatives.
 - The network potential of this event is huge and provides a very useful opportunity to see how other initiatives approach similar woodland issues.
- **Celtic Roundhouse** – On 14 May Sticklepath Conservation Volunteer Group came out to Cookworthy to work with Acting Education Ranger, Richard Irvine on the daubing of the wattle walls of the roundhouse. 20 Volunteers attended and helped to mix and cover over ¼ of the wall area with daub. A combination of fresh farmyard manure, Culm clay / soil and straw!

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- Jim White attended a public meeting of the **Bude and District Forum** at which Jonathan Ball, architect with the Eden Project, presented his outline proposals / vision for “the **Great Atlantic Way**”. This would cover much of the coastline and inland areas of North Cornwall running from Newquay Airport all the way up to the Devon border, just north of Kilkhampton. The project is an ambitious one but may complement some of the work and aims of South West Forest helping to promote use of local community woodlands and local timber through construction of the “**Weather Attraction**” at Kilkhampton.
 - Another theme of the project is alternative transport, with the aim of getting people out of their cars and taking pressure off the local country lanes. This led on neatly to Jim White’s brief presentation to the gathered assembly about the Walks for Health Launch taking place in Bude 23 June 2004. The Bude Walks for Health partnership consists of a wide range of organisations brought together by South West Forest to help provide regular weekly walks in the Bude, Stratton and ultimately, North Cornwall areas.
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- **Bluebell Sunday, Okehampton Castle** – On 9 May, over 300 Okehampton residents ventured out on damp and drizzly day to admire the bluebells in the woods of the Castle Grounds and see the work of the Old Town Park Partnership. The display included old photographs and postcards of the Old Town Park site (just across the river from the Castle), a ‘reminiscence tree’ which allowed individuals to record their memories of the site onto leaves and then fix them onto the tree. A large polystyrene backed map, punctuated with photos on flags to help establish identifiable landmarks around the site, was a focal point of the exhibition. This allowed the comments and concerns of local people to be, literally, flagged up in the appropriate location on the site. The consultation process proved very popular and will inform the drawing up of management plans and their future implementation.
 - It is anticipated that the process will be repeated at the **Okehampton Show** in August to allow more local people to have their say about the Old Town Park woods. Such an event would not have taken place without the partnership approach forged between South West Forest and West Devon Borough Council, English Heritage, Dartmoor National Park, Ockment Rivers Improvement Group, Sticklepath & Okehampton Conservation Group and West DEN.
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- Jim White attended the **Small Woods Association Conference at Aberystwyth**, on 5 June. The underpinning theme behind the SWA conference was about making woods available for people. Not just for issues of health, recreation and mental well-being but also for hard economic concerns of adding value to timber (as much as possible in situ), promoting local employment, education, training and skills. It was clear that projects currently in progress in Scotland and Wales in this respect are in advance of many projects which we currently have in the South West Forest area and the rest of England. A key driver of this development has been that of devolution, allowing a more local voice in regional decision making. We have only to look over the border to see some very good models of how it can be done.

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- **Butterfly Transect Training Day** – On 8 May, Old Town Park Partnership member Stuart Coleman inducted four local volunteers in the practice of establishing and monitoring butterfly transects at Old Town Park. This is the first stage of a wider range of biodiversity monitoring activities designed to involve local people and build up the knowledge base of the area and its ecological state of health. The activity was funded in partnership between South West Forest and the Ockment Rivers Improvement Group.

2. Progress

- **Countryside Clinics** - Holsworthy – 19 May - Three clients attended, one seeking woodland advice the remainder looking for information on the Single Farm Payment and Entry Level Scheme.
- South Molton – 6 May -Three clients attended the first clinic at South Molton, the location seems well sited above the busy pannier market. All were seeking general advice, with one potential RES applicant who was passed to AGRI-BIP for assistance with an application.
- Countryside Clinic Promotion - A brief article has been published in the weekly Farmers Fax produced by the NFU and this should prove to be very useful.

- On 7 May, **North Devon District Scout Camp** at Snapper, near Barnstaple received a visit from SWF's Forestry Advisor, David Rickwood and Woodland Project Officer, Jim White. This was to address management issues of their 2ha semi-ancient woodland and how the scouts may be more actively involved in its care and maintenance. Advice was also given on how to deal with the rampant invasion of Japanese Knotweed across approximately ¼ hectare.

- **13/05/04 – High Bickington Woodland Design Group Meeting** - Jim White and David Rickwood attended an evening meeting with local representatives on the above committee who have been challenged with drawing up plans and WGS application for High Bickington's Community Woodland. The proposed site is just 4.2ha and there are many expectations from local people as to the range of activities and interests which the site may accommodate. The group was recommended to prepare an application as soon as possible for submission and planting in the next season.

- **Advisory visits** - There were five advisory visits and four monitoring visits undertaken by David Rickwood during May.

- **Statistics for School/Community Groups participation in SWF activities:**
18/05/04 - 28 children and four adult helpers from Shebbear College Juniors joined Richard Irvine for a day of forest education and mini-beast activities at Cookworthy. This visit developed as a result of the school's activities with a Community Woodland planting event at Hill Farm in February.

- **8 & 9 June** – Two day's engagement with **Stratton Primary School** at Cookworthy saw Richard working with 28 year 1 and 31 year 4 pupils plus their helpers to learn all about habitats, finding out about the range of plants and mini-beasts which pond, grassland and forest habitat can support.

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- **20 & 21 May** – Forty Six Children from **St Mark's CE Primary School** (across key stages 1 & 2) took part in Forest Education activities with Richard Irvine over two days as part of a larger activity programme the school was running during the week. Use was made of the local nature reserve and the children sent Richard a big hand made thank you card to show their appreciation of his time with them.
- **Training** - Three technical training courses were held during May with a total of 29 beneficiaries attending, one of whom was from Cornwall.
 - Dry Stonewalling
 - Emergency First Aid
 - Strimmer/Brushcutter
- Two Best Practice events were held during May with a total of 8 beneficiaries attending, 2 of whom were from Cornwall.
 - Woodland Management and Planning
 - Managing Woodlands for Shooting

3. Meetings / Networking

- **25/05/06 – Wood Heat and Affordable Timber Housing Study Tour** - Sam Whatmore and Dr. Paul Nielson each hosted a visit from members of the High Bickington Project 2000 committee on a fact finding tour organised by South West Forest's Woodland Project Officer. The aim of the trip was to help demonstrate the benefits and potential of wood utilisation in energy efficient heating and housing systems. The High Bickington group is currently exploring housing and renewable energy options for their community development project. The use of a wood chip district heating system integrated with affordable, green oak timber frame housing would be the first of its kind in England and provide an excellent example of the potential of locally produced wood at the heart of the South West Forest.
- Jim Skelton attended a meeting of **Environment Devon** on 5 May to ensure that South West Forest is contributing fully to environmental debates in the county.
- **19/05/04 – Devon Volunteer Walk Leaders Networking Day** South West Forest hosted over thirty volunteers and Walks for Health Coordinators to share experience, points of best practice and training in matters relating to health and the outdoors.
 - Participants not only made use of the Exhibition Room and SWF tent, erected for catering out on the lawn for the occasion, but also took in a 1½ hour stroll around the rides and footpaths of the Cookworthy plantation. The event was well received by the volunteers and many commented on the quality of the venue.
- Jim Skelton and David Rickwood met with Rob Green and Sarah Manning of the Countryside Agency in May to discuss progress against a range of targets set for the project by the Countryside Agency as one of its key funders.

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- **12/05/04 – Hatherleigh Area Project – MCTi Presentation** Jim White Woodland Projects Officer attended the above presentation and brokering event. Hatherleigh benefits from the energy, skills and dedication of a wide range of local people who are passionate about bettering the quality of life for all its residents. Noteworthy projects include:
 - the construction and development of a community centre;
 - which may, in turn, house a rural business support centre, including The Countryside Clinics scheme initiated by South West Forest;
 - a youth outreach project
 - Hatherleigh Rings Project, integrated with which will be the establishment of a 4.5 hectare community woodland again supported by South West Forest.
- The event allowed the establishment of greater networking between potential support organisations and the various proposed projects / initiatives. The outcome from the event will be determined over the coming months as the projects develop and seek the support of the organisations who attended.

08/06/04 – Hatherleigh Rings Public Presentation and Consultation

- The event commenced with a visit to the site, and centre, of the proposed 'Hatherleigh Rings' Project. Yvette Martin-Fleming has been the visionary driving force behind this project and presented a clay model of the labyrinth structure to the gathered assembly. It is to be made out of cob, green oak timber and thatch showcasing and celebrating traditional building materials and skills, presenting them in a novel yet thoroughly engaging way. At the heart of the 100m diameter structure will be a 20m diameter, timber and thatch roofed performance area meeting the needs and aspirations of local people as expressed through the MCTi consultation process. Jim White gave a brief presentation about the Community Woodland element of the project which would encircle and, through careful planting design, complement the structure. Over thirty local people attended and the project received a positive if somewhat guarded response.

- On 20 May, The Director attended the **Cornish Woodmeet** Steering Group at which support was confirmed for the Cornish Sawmill and Working Woodlands III. This was followed by the full meeting of the Woodmeet where members heard from Paul Charlton about Rural Progress and Chris Bow gave a report on progress with the Working Woodlands II project.

- The latest meeting of the **South West Woodland Renaissance** Steering Group took place on 24 May. The group is overseeing the production of a detailed delivery plan by Jez Ralph. Jim Skelton was able to give encouragement to the development of timber structures to meet affordable housing needs in rural areas which fits alongside the model being developed for Eco-cabins to broaden the tourist provision in the region.