

SOUTH WEST FOREST – MONTHLY BRIEFING

November 2003

1. Events

- **Devon Rural Network (DRN)**– was launched at the Two Bridges Hotel on 21 October. Guest speaker Lord Haskins was unable to say much about his Rural Delivery Review, but he held our attention with a talk about the importance of a less centralised approach with a separation of policy and delivery. SWF Chairman, Ian Mercer had earlier excited the audience with his views on how the DRN could make a difference. Ian is interim deputy to DRN Chairman Michael Winter who opened the event.
- **Forest of Avon Networking Day** - On 8 October, the management team from Forest Of Avon visited the South West Forest on a networking day. They visited Roadford lake, Cookworthy Forest Centre and a new business being developed by a Collaboration Group member. The challenges of operating in a peri-urban environment are rather different from our own but we discovered a surprisingly strong area of common ground in what we are both trying to achieve.
- **NFU Countryside Day** – Jim Skelton attended an event organised by the NFU at Cyril Cole's farm, Lower Ashmoor. Visitors from a wide range of organisations were impressed with Mr Cole's wildlife management; his ponds were particularly impressive. Jim was given an opportunity to talk about the South West Forest's services and environmental credentials.
- **Torrige On Show** – The South West Forest display went up to Bideford for a two day exhibition to celebrate and promote the range of community based services and organisations in the Torrige District. Our stand was on the east side of the Torrige estuary at the quay where the wooden schooner Kathleen & May is situated.
- **FEI National Networking Day** - Richard Irvine attended for South West Forest. The event was hosted by The Field Studies Council and chaired by Tony Thomas, director of the FSC. Around 40 participants attended and were presented with a proposed set of 5 objectives for the FEI (Forest Education Initiative), to explore and discuss:-
 1. First hand learning opportunities
 2. Environmental awareness.
 3. Wood as a sustainable resource
 4. Economic importance
 5. Health and well being
- Case studies were presented and workshops attended which looked further into the role FEI might have in influencing policy and promoting forest based education research and activity.

SOUTH WEST FOREST – MONTHLY BRIEFING

- **Walking for Health** – Okehampton’s WHI project “Walk & Talk” was launched on 28 October. The event saw over 60 people enjoy a gentle stroll through Okehampton’s Simmons Park woodland returning to the Ockment Centre for presentations and lunch. Okehampton Mayor, Catherine Marsh spoke to the gathered assembly and a cheque for £7000, to help pay for walk leader training and promotion and publicity, was presented to SWF’s acting Education Ranger, Richard Irvine by Trish McHugh of the Countryside Agency. Richard was one of the walk leaders for the event. There are now a series of weekly short walks scheduled for November and December including walks to the Castle, Old Town Park and Simmons Park.

2. Progress

- **Leader Plus** – Marie Brompton, programme manager for NW Devon Leader + came to Cookworthy to meet with Jim White and Collaboration Group Chairman, Sam Whatmore, to guide them through the process of writing a full application to Leader +. The proposals on the table are for match funding towards a Research & Development Project for the Collaboration Group and a Farm & Forest Community Access project.

- The October Countryside Clinic at Cookworthy Forest Centre was attended by 4 visitors covering 5 sites. Advice was sought across a range of issues involving several advisors:-

- South West Forest - New Planting/Existing Planting - 3 enquiries
- Defra RDS Countryside Stewardship Scheme – 1 enquiry
- FWAG – 1 enquiry
- Ruby Country Initiative – 3 enquiries
- North Devon Enterprise Agency – 1 enquiry
- Agri-BIP – 1 enquiry

- Countryside Clinics have now been rolled out to Cornwall; the location is Hallworthy market in an attempt to take the advice to the customer. These clinics will take place on the last Friday of each month; the first was on 31 October and advisers were present from Defra’s RDS, FWAG, Agribip, West Country Rivers Trust, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission and South West Forest. We had three customers and we shall be working hard on promotion going forward to see this number grow.

- Sixteen advisory visits were undertaken during October; these all related to woodland creation and none of these were in Cornwall.

- **Roundhouse** – Sticklepath & Okehampton Conservation Group and the Leaze Adult Community Group came out to do a day’s work on the Celtic Roundhouse on 3 October. 25 volunteers participated in continuation of the thatching and commencement of the daubing. The mixing of straw, manure, clay soil and water into a homogenous mixture, smooth enough to apply to the wattle walls, proved to be hard work for the team. The Woodland Project Officer is now investigating the potential use of an authentic, Celtic cement mixer, if only one could be found!

SOUTH WEST FOREST – MONTHLY BRIEFING

- **Collaboration Group** – 39 people attended a meeting on 6 October at which the group discussed potential bids to put forward for the SW Rural Woodland Renaissance Delivery Plan. The breadth and depth of discussions was very useful and has given the steering group plenty of material for fleshing out proposed bids. Proposals include development of a promotion and marketing post, a local registered seed bank and tree nursery, a co-operative research and development project and an ambitious idea for a “forest gardens centre”.
- **Cornwall Environment Agency, Area Environment Group** – Jim White sits on this group, wearing an ‘educational hat’ to receive and share information about matters environmental in Cornwall. Sonia Thurley, Senior Environment Officer spoke to the group about the Environment Agency’s approach towards promoting best practice in land management. This is an important area of activity for SWF in Cornwall and it was noted that the Countryside Clinics (commencing on the last Friday of this month) at Hallworthy market could do much to support this process.
- **Whiddon Valley** – A site visit held to consider management of the stream which runs through the woods at Whiddon Valley has yielded information about otters sighted further up the valley; creation of artificial holts may help them to establish a greater foothold on the woodland site downstream. This would be an ideal project for local schools to be engaged with the partnership.
- **Community Woodland Strategy for North Devon** – A meeting was held between North Devon DC’s Planning Officer Andrew Austen, Community Development Officer Hannah Streatfield and SWF’s Woodland Project Officer to discuss an approach for supporting the establishment of community woodland in the district. The strategy is still in its draft stage but when completed, it will help to guide community groups through the processes and considerations required for establishing woodland for public use and benefit.
- South West Forest have been involved in advising on a potential planting site at Sheepwash where the owner is planning a new Community Woodland and a WGS Application has now been submitted to the Forestry Commission.
- **Hatherleigh Maze Project** – Jim White and David Rickwood visited a site on the outskirts of Hatherleigh with Yvette Martin-Fielding to advise on the possible establishment of a community woodland around a cob maze / labyrinth. This is an exciting project and although still at an early stage, holds strong potential to showcase use of local traditional building materials (cob and oak timber) and skills, alongside community volunteer involvement and training.
- Six technical training courses were held during October with a total of 35 beneficiaries attending, 4 of whom were from Cornwall.
 - Practical hedgelaying (2 courses)
 - Dry stone walling
 - Basic Chainsaw
 - Strimmer/Brushcutter
 - Mobile Chipper

SOUTH WEST FOREST – MONTHLY BRIEFING

- South West Forest received a 3 pages of coverage in the November issue of leading industry journal “Forestry & British Timber”. An electronic version of the article will be forwarded to the SWF Partnership as soon as it is received from the publishers.
- Four best practices event were held in October with a total of 25 beneficiaries, 9 of whom were from Cornwall.
 - Managing neglected woodlands
 - Marketing your woodland products
 - Bradford Hutt continuous cover forestry
 - Coppice management and working

3. Meetings / Networking

- Director, Jim Skelton and SWF consultant, Paul Sandys met with a number of staff from various departments of Devon County Council to discuss ways of updating timber procurement policy in the authority to maximise opportunities for local and sustainable purchasing.
- The Chairman and Director visited the National Forest on 17 October to meet Chief Executive Susan Bell and her colleague Clive Keble. They were given a very interesting tour of sites and were struck by the intensity of activity there. It is a much more populous area with all the threats and opportunities that brings; it was surprising to note that the area is much smaller than the South West Forest at about one fifth of the size.
- **Old Town Park, Okehampton** - SWF’s Forestry Advisor David Rickwood and Woodland Projects Officer, Jim White met with Dave Chapman, West Devon Borough Council’s Landscape and Tree Officer to discuss proposals for Old Town Park in Okehampton. This follows a site visit and advisory report which identified the woods, not only as an important amenity for residents and visitors to Okehampton, but also for its historic and bio-diversity value. Old Town Park falls neatly into SWF’s Civic Woodland Programme because of its community interest and potential. The formation of a partnership has been proposed to help develop and advise further, the management approach for the site.
- The South West Forest had a regular meeting with Defra’s RDS on 10 October to discuss a range of issues including the wider roll out of Countryside Clinics.
- Director, Jim Skelton met with Environment Agency staff in Cornwall to discuss ways of improving our GIS data applications.