

BHMAT NEWSLETTER

Coppice Apprenticeships – Training for Coppice Woodland Futures

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BHMAT Apprentices: news, welcome and updates!

Since the last newsletter Dave Noblett has graduated. He gave a terrific presentation at Woodland Pioneers detailing his work with Twigg over the last three years and charting his progress from part-time Viking to full time Coppicing Viking extraordinaire! Thanks to Helen Connor for help with his funding.

We have taken on Jack to work with Ian Taylor. Jack lives on the Dallam Estate in Milnthorpe and is hopeful to be able to take on some of the woodland management on the estate. With Ian's

help of course initially and eventually to have a sound base for a business there.

We took on and lost John Beaumont who was doing a self funded part-time apprenticeship split between Lorna Singleton and Edward Mills. Too complicated? Too much to do with a young family, a degree in forestry at Newton Rigg ongoing and a living to make? Well with hindsight perhaps it was a big ask. John has stepped down but promises to continue to lend a hand with both their businesses.

BHMAT AGM

Friday November 14th 7 pm

The Kings Head

Hale, on the A6 just south of Milnthorpe

Gather for food from 6pm

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The Yurt

The Bill Hogarth Memorial Apprentice trust (BHMAT) annual Woodland Pioneers event takes place in early September each year in Staveley in Cartmel. Four one day workshops are held for aspirant apprentices to learn about the coppice worker's craft and decide whether they may perhaps apply for an apprenticeship. Participants gather on the Sunday night at the woodland welcoming the opportunity to live in the woods for a week. This year the 4 day workshop for returning participants was yurt building hosted by James Mitchell (BHMAT graduate) and Walter Lloyd. Walter has constructed over 20 yurts and until recently his son Tom lived in a complex of three yurts joined together .

The aim of the week was to construct a Kirgiz yurt, about 14' diameter, with bent wood roof poles and crown and a domed overall shape. Forty roof poles and about one hundred trellis poles were required for the build.

The week began with a visit to Walter's encampment where he gave a brief history of the yurt dating back to the ice age and the inundation of the Black Sea. A foray into Walter's shed to look at the tool library (<http://walterstools.wordpress.com>) could have kept us occupied for hours but lunch was upon us and it was time to consider the task ahead.

Back in the woods a large pile of green willow rods, about 1 to 2" diameter and 8' long were beckoning and 'strip the willow' began. The willow rods having been cut from a commercial short rotation coppice destined for biofuel. The bark was slit and removed in one piece, rolled and saved for future use in leather tanning or for rope making/weaving.

A steam box linked to a pressure cooker and milk churn, set over fires to provide the steam, was established ready for steaming both the trellis poles and roof poles the poles for bending. A simple bending

frame comprising three vertical stakes was erected for the trellis poles with the willow simply woven between the stakes and left to cool.

Plate 1: Bending the trellis poles



The bent trellis rods were drilled and tied to form a diagonal trellis. Three individual trellises were constructed.

For the roof poles a greater bend was required, the lower end of the pole was shaved to about half diameter with a drawknife to allow for easier bending. A bending frame was devised from 40 gallon oil drums partly buried to give the required curvature to the lower part of the roof poles. After about two hours in the steamer the hot poles were bent over the oil drums,, and tied to a horizontal hazel rod secured to pegs.



Plate 2: Bending the roof poles

The circular crown was to be about 40" diameter

and was riven from a piece of straight grained green oak with axes and a froe then drawknifed to give two oak boards about 1" thick and 4" wide by 6'6" long. Due to initial difficulties with the steamer the crown timbers were boiled in Owen Jones's water bath, used for his oak swills. After two or three hours 'cooking' the first tannin blackened timber was slowly clamped and bent and clamped and bent etc around a circular iron former (old cartwheel) with relative ease. The next day the first timber was gently released from the former and wrapped in a ratchet strap to retain its shape. The second timber was also bent using this technique.

To join the two, roughly semi-circular, pieces the ends of each piece were trimmed with a drawknife to form a scarf joint with 7" overlap. The first joint was glued with araldite and clamped in a former overnight to allow. However, on releasing the clamps and with only slight pressure joint sprung apart. Copper nails and roves, as used in traditional boat building, were the selected means of fastening the two parts of the crown. A small diameter hole was predrilled through the crown and the copper nail hammered in. The copper rove was then driven onto the nail, using a punch, the nail cut and peened over to form a secure fixing. Six nails were used on each joint. Eventually we had a complete crown.



Plate 3: Copper nails and roves joining the crown piece

Each of the forty roof poles requires a mortice to be cut in the crown, equally spaced around the circumference which in this instance was 3400mm giving a spacing of 85mm (note millimeters were easier to divide than inches for this task). The centre of each mortice was set out using a pair of dividers, the initial marking out resulted in only a 50mm gap, not the required 85mm, between the first and last mortices. This equates to less than 1mm for each hole but is a cumulative error. After consulting Walter this was deemed unacceptable, the dividers were reset and marked out a second time, success, the difference this time being about 3mm out. The mortices were initially drilled at an appropriate angle (35° for this project but may vary with the type and diameter of yurt) with a 3/4" auger. James had a local blacksmith make a 3/4" square 'dragon' to burn the square mortices. The dragon was heated in a small rocket stove filled with charcoal, after much puffing and blowing (well done James!) the charcoal reached the required heat and the burning of the holes could begin. A slow process as each heating of the dragon only burnt one complete mortice.



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Plate 4: Burning the mortices with the dragon

A piece of gently rounded peeled oak was selected for threshold for the doorway with two uprights shaped from green oak. A piece of twisted oak from a recently felled tree was selected for the door lintel. The hewing and shaping of this lintel took a significant time but the finished piece with ornamental carving and a welcome message was well worth



the effort.

Plate 5: adding the final details to the door lintel.

Finally all the component parts were ready and the three trellis sections were erected around a 14' diameter circle, a tension band of hemp rope was tightened around the trellis and tied to the door posts to restrain the trellis and initially four roof poles were inserted into the crown and tied into the trellis to support the crown. Gradually more roof poles were added and tied in. It became apparent that the yurt would sustain a larger diameter, design is not an exact science, and the trellis was carefully eased out. Once all the roof poles were inserted into the crown and securely fastened we had a strong stable structure ready, one day for the felt and canvas cover.



Plate 6: the square tenons of the roof poles inserted into the crown

This was to be the culmination of five days effort, not the four days originally anticipated, by the team of seven full time 'students' with occasional outside assistance. James was ever present to guide and supervise the process making continual adjustments to accord with the materials available and how they performed and reacted as they were peeled, steamed, shaved and shaped.

Throughout the build Walter was on hand to give sage advice on yurt construction and all manner of other woodland crafts and skills, he also admitted to having learnt a lot about yurt building over the five days. He expressed his satisfaction at the high standard of workmanship shown in the construction. Perhaps the experience will be encompassed in his book on yurts.

Now James has the task of fine tuning the construction, fitting the roof poles to the door lintol, perhaps rebending some of the roof poles and making a shaped cover to give a durable outdoor structure which should last for many tears to come.

Wilson Irving 12 September 2014

Woodland Pioneers

In early September by car, van, bike and train the annual migration of coppice workers occurs to a secluded woodland somewhere in Lakeland. Gathering to share skills and recount the adventures of the past year.

Daily the pack splits into small groups led by the elders who impart ancient woodland skills, of coppicing, stool making, oak swills and treen, each group working diligently in small woodland clearings riding shave horses, the smoke from fires curling gently though the canopy with the sound of axes striking freshly felled oak ringing through the air. At 12.30 each day a feast of soup, prepared using secret recipes, and fresh baked bread from the wood fired oven is served to the hungry hoard.

The gathering culminates in the fire festival. In a clearing deep in the forest the orange flames and sparks from the fire reach skyward and merge with the stars, a watery moon shines through the stand of oak and surveys the proceedings. The haunting sounds of the accordion, banjo and guitar call those present to witness the evenings proceedings. Workers of all ages from new born babes upwards attend.

Singing and music relax the soul combined with devilish brews drunk by the gallon.

The atmosphere builds slowly with preliminary skirmishes of bum wars, slack lining and the 2p game beginning to establish the pecking order.

Suddenly a burning box is broken over someone's head signalling the start of the rut. Fire diving and wrestling accompanied by much frivolity, roaring and grunting serve to establish the dominant males.

Slowly the participants merge into the woods, some never to be seen again. Hardy souls stay around the fire until sunrise.

All rise lethargically the next day to pack and disperse for another year.

A crowd gathers, hurrah the yurt is complete for all to crowd into the small space, a symbol of the coppice workers art and craft.



But who is this coming through the woods? The festivities of the previous night have awoken the bare footed bog monster but he doesn't seem to mind, content to amuse little children with tales of the woods, hewing and cleaving vast oak trees to make boardwalks. WAI Sept 2014

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Funding News

We have been having quite a good spell this year! It didn't start too well as the Heritage lottery funding we went for to train urban coppice apprentices in the NW region did not come off. And a Princes Trust funding bid failed but they only funded 15 projects and there were 250 applicants! Our luck changed in the summer with a big bid for 57k from the Headley Trust was approved. We will share this money with the National Coppice Apprenticeship scheme, to return the favour for splitting previous Headley Trust money with us.

The biggest boost to morale though was the Buzzbnk crowd funding appeal that netted us 16K although 12k of that was an extension of the donation we received from a lovely lady called Helen in memory of her late husband. The rest was made up of many supporters some we knew well and some complete strangers that donated £10,20,50 and made it possible for us to really get going on taking on new apprentices this year.

We have the prospect of funding two new apprentices to be based in the Rusland Valley under the HLF Rusland Horizons which has the aim to restore coppice woodlands in the project area. They are still at the development phase but if all goes well we should be able to recruit for an early 2016 start.



Plate 7: The Yurt Team L to R: Wilson, Giles, Walter, Mark, Sarah, Olly, James, Emma, Fi

*Supported by:
The Headley Trust, Small Woods Association,
Sir John Fisher Foundation, Ernest Cook Trust, Helen Connor*

Lovely buzzbnk funders - Thank you very much!!