



The Cleft Stick



Issue 4; April 2015.

Newsletter of the National Coppice Federation

Hazel Coppice – its restoration and improvement - Seminar.

May 13th and 14th, 2015.



from **this** to **this**?



Earning a living by cutting hazel requires a reliable, high quality, woodland resource. The industry has been in decline, though, for much of the past two centuries and even woods that are being worked regularly are deteriorating due to poor working practices. The greenwood revival of recent years has increased the demand for coppice products across the country, but the industry has not been well placed to meet this demand.

This seminar will bring some of the country's leading restoration practitioners together with experts in relevant fields to establish some 'best practice' guidelines. The emphasis of the Seminar will be very much on sharing experiences within what is a relatively new discipline – hazel restoration has been going on haphazardly around the country for some years now, sometimes successfully, as often unsuccessfully, but there is much information to be gathered together and shared around.

The venue is the National Arboretum at Westonbirt in Gloucestershire, where some twenty five acres of coppice have been brought back into some form of rotation since the early 1990's. The successes and failures of this project (which will eventually total sixty acres) will form the practical backdrop to the Seminar's discussions.

For more information (and booking forms) go to the NCFed website on www.ncfed.org.uk.

The Burning Issue - Charcoal Burners Unite!

At the last AGM in Dorset, some 12 charcoal burners broke off from proceedings and held a meeting to discuss the issues surrounding making charcoal in the 21st century. As a result a sub-committee was formed to drive forward our agenda.

Some aims discussed were...

- To create a NCFed Charcoal Burners Trade Group to act as a catalyst for the industry
- To design and produce a new generic NCFed charcoal bag for use by any burner
- To raise awareness of local charcoal suppliers amongst the general public
- To develop a central database of charcoal suppliers on the NCFed website
- To help increase direct sales and therefore profitability
- To add value to local charcoal as a niche product
- To explore the potential of the Biochar market
- To share skills, knowledge and technical developments
- To share marketing skills
- To explore having a trade specific website to promote British Charcoal
- To explore funding joint 'Buy Local, Buy British Charcoal' advertising campaigns

New Local Charcoal Campaign web-page

There is a new Local Charcoal Campaign web-page for charcoal burners on the NCFed website. There is also a facility for you to leave your comments and ideas at the bottom of the page.

Visit www.ncfed.org.uk/local-charcoal-campaign/ for details. Get involved, let us know what you think needs doing, and sign up to the Local Charcoal Suppliers Directory now!

Local Charcoal Suppliers Directory

In order to make it easier for the public to find a source of local charcoal, there is now a free database of suppliers names and contacts, all listed alphabetically under their county. Please send your details now to be included in this list. Take a look at <http://ncfed.org.uk/public/charcoal-suppliers/> for further details. This is for public sales and outlets so if you don't want the public phoning you up it is not for you!

I look forward to hearing from all you fellow burners out there

Dave Jackson (info@wildwoodcrafts.com) (07814 487578)

Biochar: What is it? And what are its Uses?

(From the British Biochar Foundation; www.britishbiocharfoundation.org)

Plants have the ability to take in light from the sun, water and nutrients from the soil and carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the atmosphere and through the process of photosynthesis convert these raw materials into woody biomass where the carbon is now incorporated into organic compounds. Humans have for many years utilised this process and produced charcoal from woody plant mass through the process of pyrolysis. This charcoal would have traditionally been used for fuel but may have had many other uses.

Materially, charcoal is one type of biochar. But, unlike charcoal, biochar is not a fuel. The whole point of biochar is *not* to burn it as it will then simply release CO₂ back to the atmosphere. Biochar can be made from just about any type of biomass, not just woody feedstocks. Traditional charcoal making in devices such as ring-kilns, soil pits, beehive brick and mud kilns, etc., tends to release considerable quantities of 'fugitive gas' emissions – including powerful greenhouse gas, nitrous oxide and methane – as well as particulates which are dangerous to human health. Charcoal making may also use woody feedstocks which accelerate deforestation. By contrast, biochar uses modern technological designs which ensure clean production and only sustainable biomass feedstocks are used (such as agri-forestry residues, forest wastes, sawdust, sludges, etc. not already used productively). Biochar can be used for any purpose that does not result (unlike with fuel) in the immediate or short-term release of the stored carbon back into the atmosphere. At the moment its use as a soil amendment is the most common, but there are many more potential uses.

The carbon stored in the biochar is effectively stolen from the atmosphere of our planet and retained in the soil. In a world where the combustion of fossil fuels, deforestation by humans and increasing agricultural intensification are causing increased carbon dioxide levels and climatic changes, this carbon storing capacity is very exciting. Biochar may be able to help us mitigate climate change and help governments reach demanding CO₂ emission reduction targets (e.g. halving global carbon emissions from 1990 levels by 2050 at the latest). In collaboration with other technologies biochar may help us create the low carbon sustainable economy that we will soon need.

But what uses does the end product, the biochar, have? A major role that is currently being researched is biochar's ability to enhance agricultural productivity. The large surface area of biochar increases the ability of the soil to retain water and also may prevent nutrient leaching and increase the nutrient's accessibility to the plants. Biochar can also act as a carbon source for soil microbes, many of which are beneficial for plant growth, but the amount of available carbon is quite limited as most is locked-up in molecules that microbes cannot access at all easily. Biochar also improves the physical condition of soils, improving their drainage and ease of ploughing and can also act to increase soil pH. The number of crops and agricultural landmass that could show these agricultural benefits from biochar is largely unknown, but experiments such as the BIG BIOCHAR EXPERIMENT and replicated field trials worldwide have been conducted and have shown positive results, though also sometimes 'no effect' and occasionally a negative response.

But biochar need not only be used in soils. There are many uses which may also become of importance as the biochar industry develops. It may be utilised in animal feed, as a waste water filter or even in cosmetic products such as soaps and shampoos.

Biochar can be produced from waste wood products and future products are possible which would bring agricultural benefits and climate mitigation potential thereby the potential for an additional source of revenue. The production of biochar also produces a lot of heat which can be harnessed to supply warmth and hot water to premises.

Biochar holds a lot of potential and there is still a lot of uncertainty. The industry is still in its infancy and slowly developing mainly in Europe, North America, Japan, China and Australia. A recent report by the International Biochar Initiative (IBI) showed that scientific research is also increasing in the area with over 380 papers published on biochar in 2013 an increase of 5-fold from the previous five years.

The coppicing industry is in a good position to get involved with producing biochar. In particular, at present, the brash is simply burned and represents a waste. Instead of burning this brash, it could be turned into biochar. This is made possible by transportable retorts such as the Exeter Retort which can be taken to the coppicing site (www.biocharretort.com) or kilns such as the Kon-Tiki open fire kiln which appears to be clean-burning but definitive data is now being collected to confirm the visual observations (See Schmidt & Taylor, 2014). They are easy to use and would enable a waste to be turned in useful biochar.

The British Biochar Foundation was set up in 2013 and aims to help develop and integrate the biochar industry in the UK. We want to bring together anyone who is interested in biochar development in the country allowing them to share experience and knowledge and to form new ideas and make contacts. This is achieved mostly through the website (www.biochar.org.uk) though two very successful national meetings have also been held.

BIOCHAR may well be able to help us develop the low carbon economy of the future whilst providing other important benefits. Whilst this is a difficult task to achieve, it is not impossible and, arguably, it is necessary to respond effectively to climate change. Creating biochar from waste products may offer additional income for producers, a source of energy and a method of waste disposal. Whilst doing this, it can also sequester carbon and in some cases increase agricultural yields. There is a lot to be excited about.

Simon Shackley, Tom White and Hannah Scott; British Biochar Foundation

References

Schmidt HP, Taylor P: *Kon-Tiki - The democratization of biochar production*, the Biochar Journal 2014, Arbaz, Switzerland. ISSN 2297-1114 www.biochar-journal.org/en/ct/39 Version of 29th November 2014 Accessed: 11.01.2015

International Biochar Initiative. State of the Biochar Industry 2013, http://www.biochar-international.org/State_of_industry_2013

The National Coppice Federation Gathering, 2014 was held at the Ancient Technology Centre near Cranbourne, Dorset on the weekend of 18th and 19th October 2014.



The Dorset Coppice Group organised an amazing weekend alongside the NCFed Committee, around 50 people attended representing coppice groups from around the country.

Two field trips were organised to Garston Wood (RSPB) and Bonsley Wood (Home to the Dorset Coppice Group). Tools for self-reliance were present on Saturday with an array of reasonably priced tools for sale and much skill sharing took place around the excellent setting of the site.



Saturday evening was the time for business before pleasure, with the AGM being held in the Earth Round House, once AGM business was undertaken themes for the future was the main point of discussion, with the following suggestions from the floor and also afternoon workshops on the future and also on entrants into the profession.

Priorities for NCFed:

- Publicity
- New Entrants
- Housing and living land access
- Product value (Grown in Britain)
- Funding
- Deer Management
- Coppice restoration
- Biosecurity
- Professionalism

The top 3 priorities for 2014/15 were voted as being Publicity, Coppice restoration and Housing.

Overall a very good weekend, with a lot of good discussion and sharing of skills, the new NCFed tee-shirt was available for sale and I believe a reasonable amount were purchased on the day.

Many thanks to all the organisers and even though numbers were lower than at Worcestershire in 2013 it was still a successful weekend. Next year the event will be held in Cumbria.

The following weekend I attended the 36th National Hedgelaying Championships to represent both NCFed and the East Midlands Coppice Association and gained much interest in both organisations, I can see bigger links between the NCFed and the National Hedgelaying Society in future years.



Andy Alder (Woodscape Woodland Management and East Midlands Coppice Association.)

Countryside Stewardship and Cross Compliance - It is not all bad news!

NCFed has been seeking clarification since the new DEFRA regulations on Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition standards (GAEC), or Cross Compliance, were published, which seemed to suggest that anyone in receipt of EU funding for woodland work would be obliged to not cut coppice between May and September. CANW member Ian Taylor sent a letter that NCFed had drafted to his MP Tim Farron who took it up with the minister, Ian had made the point that the entire oak bark tanning industry was at risk if we were unable to fell and peel oak in the peeling season. It has now been announced that in fact woodlands are exempt from these guidelines. There will be a minimum area to constitute 'woodland' but it seems we can breathe a sigh of relief.

We have since received a letter from George Eustace MP Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Farming, Food and Marine Environment, confirming this and going on to state that 'In recent years it has been increasingly apparent that coppicing is now an economically viable operation, particularly due to the increase in the value of wood fuel and other products'.

This may be the case in many instances but it completely ignores the situation where out of rotation hazel coppice has very little value and restoration when accompanied by other conservation measures such as burning of brash or layering is just not viable.

When Kevin May, the FC architect of the new grant scheme 'Countryside Stewardship', was quizzed about this at a meeting he said 'you may just have to extend your rotations', ie turn all coppice coups into firewood!

We are continuing to press for more recognition of coppicing under CS because at the moment it seems as though anything tagged 'woodland conservation' has fallen between two stools and has little or no support under the new regime. There may be a glimmer of hope for some changes when the new parliament is in place, so it is not too late to press for changes. Do get in touch if you want more info or ideas for action.

Rebecca Oaks. NCFed Chair. rebecca.oaks@btinternet.com

2015 NCFed Gathering (and AGM) goes to Cumbria!

Venue:

Grizedale Campsite
Bowkerstead farm
Satterthwaite
Ulverston
Cumbria
LA12 8LL

AGM at 'The Yan' Visitor Centre.

Date: 17th and 18th of October (early arrivals from 3pm on the 16th)

Cost: To be confirmed, but in the region of £30/£35 for food, entertainment and accommodation.

More information will go up on the NCFed website (www.ncfed.org.uk) as details are confirmed. Get those dates in your Diary now, though.

Hosted by the Coppice Association Northwest (www.coppicenorthwest.org.uk)

The Cleft Stick – future issues.

Apologies are due for the long gap between the previous issue and this one. I am intending to regularise the Cleft Stick's appearance and move it from being an 'as and when' publication to one going out four times a year – winter, spring, summer and autumn. This being the Spring (April) issue, the next one will come out in early July, when a glorious summer will be enveloping us.

The NCFed website.

This, too, was missing for the early part of this year due to the activity of hackers (it seems they don't only operate out in the woods!). It is now back online and, hopefully, much better protected. The Forum is also offline at the moment but will return as soon as the necessary security has been build in to protect it from spam. New stuff is being added to the website all the time, so please keep checking it out.

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The National Coppice Federation www.ncfed.org.uk