

The Cleft Stick Autumn 2020 issue



From NCFed's Chair, Dave Jackson



Welcome to the Autumn Issue of the Cleft Stick. I've been Chair for one year now, and what a year it's been! A year dominated for many by the challenges of Covid-19 but also a year marked by a flurry of consultations and changing regulations which may affect many of us in our day to day work.

As a result, the new Strategy Sub-Committee (StratSC), which oversees NCFed's responses to such matters, has been working hard throughout the summer. Some of the issues addressed are outlined below. Others feature in the 'News' section of the website too. Current issues which we'll be addressing include the new Fisa chainsaw regulations and a Woodsure Group Scheme for NCFed members. StratSC has core members, but I invite anyone with relevant skills, knowledge or interest to contribute to our work.

The Media and Marketing Sub-Committee (MAMSC), whilst also supporting the work of StratSC, continues to do fine work co-ordinating this newsletter, website, social media, printed and digital media and supporting NCFed events such as Bean Pole Week, National Coppice Week and the Annual Gathering.

Some of you may have noticed the change in name of our Facebook Group to 'National Coppice Federation Group' instead of simply 'NCFed'. This has resulted in a rapidly expanding FB Group membership. Our challenge now should be to encourage those who aren't currently NCFed members to join through their local coppice group. I also want to investigate the creation of a new

National Coppice Group, affiliated to the NCFed, to give a home and voice to all those coppice workers who for whatever reason, do not have a natural local group.

The Directors and Group Reps have had a number of meetings throughout the year. I am very keen that these meetings should be used as a vehicle for your Group Reps to lobby the Directors to engage in issues that you, the membership, feel we should be addressing on your behalf. We currently have a great enthusiastic team of people helping to drive things forward and further develop the organisation into a forceful and effective voice. I would like to thank them all for their continued hard work.

We have recently said goodbye to Rob Newby as a Director, but Rob continues to be proactive in his capacity as Group Rep and as a member of MAMSC. We do need more Directors however and I am particularly keen to seek representation from the south coast coppice groups, none of which are currently represented on the Board. NCFed's AGM will be held on-line in December, so please get your nominations for Directors in. See separate AGM article below for more details. Jim Bettle from Dorset is now acting as NCFed Charcoal Rep. We are still seeking a replacement for the Social Media Officer role - please see vacancies section below.

We will continue to work on a number of internal issues, namely the following...

NCFed communications and discussion forum

We are currently dependent on Facebook Messenger and email for much of our discussion. Email can be problematic due to a lack of continuity of thread, whilst Messenger is not used by all, often for personal reasons. We are therefore investigating other platforms to facilitate director and coppice group interaction.

Funding bid

Initial discussions concluded that as a precursor to pursuing funding we would need to develop a sustainable business model. This may involve a review of our subscription model and a strategy for increasing other income streams.

NCFed patron

It has been voiced that a suitable patron could serve NCFed well in promoting the issues that the coppice industry faces. However, once again we feel that much background work has to be done in the first instance so that any potential patron has a well oiled NCFed machine behind them.

All in all, it has been a very busy and demanding year here, and this looks set to continue!

Hope to see you (on-screen) at the forthcoming AGM.

Dave Jackson
Chair

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From the Editor

I hope you'll enjoy reading this edition of Cleft Stick and find the content interesting and useful. There's nothing from the groups this time as generally it's not been that kind of year, but there is plenty of other stuff to keep you amused of an autumnal evening.

The responses to the consultations Dave Jackson mentions are inevitably a bit wordy but reading them here could save you hours elsewhere and result in you being on the case with some important current developments. Some feathers were ruffled by Rob Newby's piece in our last edition, in which he described his troubles with Forestry England. Hopefully, Pete Etheridge's positive response in this edition, provides balance and may help straighten that plumage a little. In her article, Judith Millidge, Editor of 'Living Woods Magazine' outlines the benefits, as she sees them, of a closer relationship between woodland owner and coppice worker; a thought-provoking read. And, once again, there's a poem!

A warm welcome to Jim Bettle of the Dorset Charcoal Co. who has joined the Media and Marketing Sub-committee as our Charcoal Representative. I'm sure Jim's thoughtful article will interest all you wood colliers out there, but give it a look even if you don't produce the black stuff yourself.

In this edition I've used plenty of 'Read more' links. These shorten the first message you receive, making it quicker to scan for stuff you want to read. When you click a 'Read more' link, a new browser window will open so you'll need to close that to return to the original Cleft Stick.

I've been looking towards the winter's hard grind with a deal of trepidation, but now we've enjoyed some autumnal weather, I've located my jumpers and coats and had a couple of weeks in the woods, I'm feeling a little more like facing another December.

If you have thoughts about the content of this edition or anything else coppice-related, please send it to me at news@nced.org.uk by the end of March 2021.

Guy Lambourne, Editor

News



NCFed AGM 2020

Friday 18th December



As you will know from the last Cleft Stick, it was decided to cancel this year's annual gathering due to Covid-19. However, the AGM must go on! This will be an on-line event. We are working on the arrangements and programme and will be sharing these with you very shortly.

We are however seeking nominations for Directors. Tim Cumine (Secretary) was co-opted earlier this year and therefore Tim will stand down and stand to be formally elected. We have at least two additional vacancies for elected Directors. Nomination forms will be sent out imminently.

In the meantime please put the date in your diary - **Friday 18th December** - and look out for details to follow very soon.

Ash Safety Concerns

Safety concerns over ash are serious. Rumour has it that there is guidance in the pipeline around needing to show a level of competence for felling dead or diseased ash.

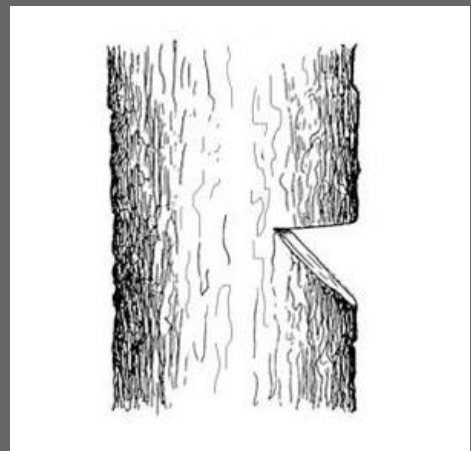
- Best practice is to avoid hand felling wherever possible, as it is safer sitting in a cab than standing under an unpredictable tree.
- When hand cutting can't be avoided, be confident the escape route is good, use other trees as protection from falling branches.
- The hinge can't be trusted so fell in the direction of lean whenever possible.
- Wedges can dislodge weak branches, so mechanical wedges are recommended.
- Winching carries a risk of the hinge popping off forward, use Humboldt* cuts to mitigate against this.
- On big trees some people are using spotters to check the crown while it's being felled and warn the cutter if something does dislodge.
- Felling diseased ash is quite specialised and requires experience

Once there is a serious injury, legislation will likely follow.

Source FISA [web site](#)

With thanks to Toby Allen of Say it With Wood

*Humboldt cut – an 'upside down' felling job



Firewood and Timber Markets

As well as being hopeless for sledging, last winter's wet, mild conditions also led to depressed sales of firewood so less wood was burned, and once the ground dried in spring the market was flooded as everyone started moving wood again. The dry summer has been good for extracting timber so most markets are full. There is a large amount of beetle damaged spruce coming over from Europe so biomass prices are fairly flat. Corona meant a lot of chip-heated businesses (like Heathrow) were shut, lessening demand a little more.

According to timberauctions.co.uk there are some signs of shortages of small round wood and firewood in the north of England, sawlogs in the east and south of England and large diameter oak sawlogs. Something positive perhaps.

www.timberauctions.co.uk

Hand Sanitiser Alert



An employee of [a non-forestry] company used alcohol based sanitiser as recommended during the Corona pandemic. The person touched a metal surface before the liquid evaporated. Due to static electricity, the vapour from the hand sanitiser ignited with an almost invisible flame on both hands. The person quickly managed to get to a sink to extinguish the flame. As a result of the incident the person suffered first and second degree burns. Source - [Forest Industry Safety Accord \(FISA\)](#)

This happened inside in a factory where plentiful water was available easily and although it may seem a bit of a freak occurrence, we're all probably armed with some kind of hand gel as well as other more traditional flammables, when out and about, so it might serve as a reminder to carry lots of water, especially when a fire's on the job list.

Thatching Spars



The 'Thatch Advice Centre' aims to offer relevant, useful and up to date information so that anyone can make an informed decision on whatever they are doing or planning with their thatched property.

A spokesperson said recently: "In the Thatch Advice Centre's opinion, the making of thatching spars in the UK is in decline. Some thatchers can still make spars but it is definitely the minority. It seems that not so many coppice workers make spars either! This may be due to lack of supply of materials and perhaps cost or profitability. Many thousands of spars are currently imported (ready twisted) from abroad and we are not sure that all thatchers can even twist a spar nowadays. It will be interesting to see if Brexit has any effect on this supply chain. We look forward to collaborating with the National Coppice Federation in the future as #workingtogether is one of our aims."

Expect to see more thatch-related content in future editions of CS.

<https://www.thatchadvicecentre.co.uk/>

Spar makers - what do you think? Let us know via news@ncfed.org.uk



AudioMoth Brings AI to Woodland Bat Research



The hidden habits of England's rare woodland bats are being revealed in ways never seen before thanks to ground-breaking new Artificial Intelligence technology piloted by Forestry England and the Bat Conservation Trust.

This pilot succeeded in recording and identifying nearly 2 million bat calls in summer 2019, presenting a huge step forward in understanding the behaviour of important protected species and the health of woodlands and biodiversity more generally.

The pilot is the first of its kind in the UK and emerged when Forestry England and the Bat Conservation Trust decided to collaborate. They wanted to test whether a low-cost static acoustic sensor, together with cutting-edge AI-assisted sound identification tools, could help discover more about the bats living in the nation's forests and contribute to conservation efforts. Before these innovations in technology, large scale surveys in woodland of these elusive mammals had not been viable because bat detecting equipment was costly and to get this amount of data would have taken too many people too much time.

The AudioMoth has been a game-changer, with its advanced capabilities and low cost meaning large numbers of sensors can be left in the field to record bat echolocation all night. Forestry England wildlife and ecology staff had 60 monitoring locations across 16 forests and the 400 surveys recorded 7 million potential bat calls. Data crunching and analysis took place over the winter using AI tools developed by researchers at UCL, and successfully identified 1.7 million bat calls to 8 species and 2 species groups.

Hampshire sighting of Asian Hornet



Have you seen an Asian hornet? If so, the Great Britain Non-native Species Secretariat wants to hear from you. The National Bee Unit confirmed a sighting near Gosport, Hampshire in mid-September and monitoring is underway to detect any others in the vicinity.

The Asian hornet is smaller than our native hornet and poses no greater risk to human health than our native wasps and hornets. However, they do pose a risk to honey bees and work is already underway to monitor for any hornet activity and to identify any nests nearby.

This was the first confirmed UK sighting since October 2019, when two related nests were detected and destroyed near Christchurch, Dorset.

For more information, [click here](#)

If you have seen this alien send details and a picture to alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk

With thanks to Bob Hewitt

National Coppice Week

Although it was disappointing that National Coppice Week didn't happen this year, in some ways I was relieved. Last year's was a great start for a national thing and I think, sowed the seeds of something bigger and better. However, I have decided that I don't have time to lead on it next year. So we need someone else who might be willing to take it on.

Could you be Ms, Mrs or Mr. NCW 2021? If so, please let us know. Mostly it's enthusing people about the value of such a promotional venture and encouraging and helping those who look like potential participants to go for it. In reality, it could develop in all sorts of ways.

I think it's an important initiative for NCFed and has the potential to raise the profile of the coppice industry in the minds of customers, allies and politicians. If you would be worried about going it alone, don't be; I and the rest of the Media and Marketing Sub-committee would be there to help and advise.

So if you'd like to find out more, drop me a line via news@ncfed.org.uk

Guy Lambourne

Member of the East Anglian Coppice Network

NCFed Charcoal Rep



Greetings from Dorset. My name is Jim Bettle and I established The Dorset Charcoal Co. back in 1997. In early spring this year I was asked by the NCFed board whether I would take on the role of NCFed Charcoal Rep. to oversee all things charcoal related with regards NCFed. Having accepted the role, the world changed somewhat due to Covid19 and we have never experienced a summer like it!

Everyone's experiences have been different but we (The Dorset Charcoal Co.) have considered ourselves some of the lucky ones as not only have we been able to keep working but have also experienced unprecedented demand!

There are many reasons for this, not least: lockdown, glorious early summer weather, customers discovering their local independent retailers (farm shops, butchers and village shops as opposed to large garden centres and supermarkets) and difficulties early in the year with the imported charcoal supply chain.

More people will have discovered British charcoal for the first time this year, so I see a challenge in how we can capitalise on this. Through my experience with my own business I appreciate that promotion and publicity is a never-ending task and look forward to finding ways in which NCFed can help with this for all British charcoal producers.



There are also lots of issues that affect all UK charcoal producers that will be considered. Sadly the British Charcoal Group established by Don Kelley is no more, but this was a useful place for discussions regarding such issues as standardisation of production; be it in what raw material is used, bag design, bag weighing etc. I hope that NCFed can replicate the role in the years ahead.

In addition, larger issues are at play such as VAT on charcoal, imported charcoal not having to state its country of origin, the need for larger pyrolysis plants in the UK to meet the UK demand, and accreditation schemes such as 'Grown in Britain' and the FSC; all of which NCFed is well placed to consider and lobby for change where possible!

So there's a lot to be considered and I look forward to tackling some of these issues over the coming months. To that end please look out for the new NCFed website page, posts on Facebook and articles in upcoming editions of Cleft Stick, relating to "the burning issues".

Best regards
Jim Bettle
NCFed Charcoal Rep

A Summer of Surveys

Hot on the heels of last winter's billions of trees promised by politicians, 2020's lockdown summer threw up a cluster of woodland surveys:

- The National Forest Inventory (NFI)
- The British Woodland Survey
- The UK Woodland Assurance Standard
- The England Tree Strategy

Tim Cumine, NCFed's Secretary, worked diligently through the summer months, responding to all these on behalf of the Federation. His superb summaries can be read on the Fed's website [here](#)

The Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMs)



As the UK leaves EU strictures behind, weighs anchor and sails away from the Common Agricultural Policy, ELMs is how government proposes to support England's foresters, farmers and land managers' incomes. Distinct from previous rural subsidies, that were based on land ownership and targeted activities on that land, ELMs aims to reward environmental services delivered, under the flag of 'public money for public goods'.

Rather than being overly prescriptive, it intends that land managers have greater freedom to rely on their own judgement, local knowledge, advice, planning and collaboration with others to achieve environmental goals. Previous schemes are now recognised as having been cumbersome, with uneven take-up, which skewed rural markets. ELMs aims to be simpler to join; hitting the desired outcomes will be supported by advice, published standards and local co-operation.

The whole scheme is still in development, with tests and trials in place and new funding regimes being piloted. A public consultation ran until the end of July. The intention is to continue to develop ELMs until 2024 and phase it in fully by 2028.

ELMs is organised within a 3-tier system.

Tier 1 supports those outcomes that might become standard environmental practice in all land management situations, like the management of pests, nutrients, water and boundaries to avoiding

soil compaction and run-off, maintaining water in peatlands and biodiverse corridors at the edges of holdings. The scheme will define what is to be achieved either by publishing standards for various broad land types – upland, dairy, arable – or by allowing managers to choose from a range of actions (closer to the current regime) or a mixture of both, expecting a minimum standard of practice, enhanced by other targeted measures.

Tier 2 is intended to target those aspects of land management that need to be locally determined, perhaps requiring co-operation between farmers, foresters and land managers and that would engage the services of advisors. Trees and hedgerow management are included here with habitat creation, species management, flood mitigation and rights of way. Subsidy in these areas might require meeting the basic standards of Tier 1 in addition to results-based payments.

Tier 3 targets landscape level activities such as the development of new forests and woodland, peatland restoration and support for coastal wetland and saltmarsh restoration, geared to meeting National Nature Recovery and international climate change commitments.

NCFed's Strategy Sub Committee relied on the expertise of Dorset and Hampshire member Pete Etheridge to form our response to DEFRA's consultation which:

- encouraged DEFRA to include forestry and woodland practices within Tier 1 of ELMs,
- highlighted lack of rural broadband and IT capacity as potential barriers to engagement,
- suggested support for project management, marketing, and organisation of contractors as key to successful working across multiple land holdings,
- promoted NCFed's group network as a source of regional coppice expertise and market rates for small woodland contracting work,
- recommended considering direct payment of subsidy to woodland contractors,
- advised reference to regional expert woodland advisors in confirming the success of subsidised coppice activities, and
- offered NCFed's support in developing coppice aspects of ELMs.

Useful Links:

- [Government Farming Strategy](#)
- [ELMs in detail](#)
- [Confor's detailed response](#)

Tim Cumine, Secretary of NCFed and member of Anglesey & North Gwynedd Coppice Group

NCFed Strategy

The last issue of Cleft Stick reported that NCFed had formed LobSC, a permanent Sub-Committee to address the need for NCFed to lobby others with influence, in pursuit of its aims. It was swiftly pointed out that there is a question of putting cart and horse in the right order. While we might indeed need a sturdy beast to pull our goods to town, it would perhaps be as well to better define what's on the wagon we're taking to market.

NCFed aims to promote coppice, provide a unified voice for regional groups and promote best practice. These aims are fixed in our constitution, yet to make progress towards them requires discretion, experience and discussion. So, we decided to change LobSC to STRATSC - the Strategy Sub-Committee.

Current members are Martin Hales, Paul Trevor, Dave Jackson, Toby Allen and Tim Cumine, with welcome input from Pete Etheridge, who so confidently framed our ELMs response. In addition to the activities reported elsewhere in this edition, largely firefighting a sudden flush of woodland agencies requiring our opinion this summer, there is a range of other plans afoot for better meeting NCFed's aims, including responses to FISA's recent changes in chainsaw competency rules and co-operation with the Heritage Crafts Association to update their Red List of Endangered Crafts.

If you would like to bring any matters to the attention of the Strategy Sub-Committee, email strategy@ncfed.org.uk.

The Media and Marketing Sub-Committee (MAMSC)

Since the Spring 2020 Issue of Cleft Stick, MAMSC has had just one Skype meeting. Subjects covered included this issue of the Cleft Stick; some preliminary discussions about the roles and aims of NCFed's newly appointed Charcoal Rep, (Jim Bettle joined us for the first part of our meeting); a new charcoal page on the NCFed website; the need for high resolution quality graphics for the NCFed name and logo; possibility of seeking funding for an NCFed Administrative Officer and also, on a separate issue, the appointment of a Social Media Officer (see Vacancies in this issue of Cleft Stick).

Other items discussed included the introduction of a "Promotional Plan" (to focus on the marketing and promotion of next year's first event, and beyond, in NCFed's 2021 calendar; use of the NCFed Instagram account as somewhere to celebrate NCFed members' work; clarification of the roles and responsibilities of MAMSC; a coppicing educational resources page on the website; NCFed letter signatures for use on NCFed emails and of course for that occasional written letter! It was a long meeting.

Please feel free to contact MAMSC with any marketing or promotional ideas you would like us to discuss: mamsc@ncfed.org.uk

Tim Roskell, MAMSC Secretary

About the Fed



NCFed Vacancies

Social media officer (Facebook and Instagram) for NCFed

This is a paid vacancy needing only something like half an hour over a period of each week
Responsibilities will include:

Facebook

1. Posting something every week, that's of interest and relevance to our discussion Facebook page "National Coppice Federation Group".
2. Be responsible for moderating comments on the Group page as, on the odd occasion, things can get a bit heated between folks! If any such situation arises you would be one of three in the moderating team - we would swiftly discuss what action is required. Apart from monitoring comments, this group page should more or less run itself.
3. Posting, as and when something crops up (eg. relevant Government initiatives etc.) that is of interest to our main "business" Facebook page "NCFed".
4. Sharing Facebook posts from both the NCFed group and business Facebook pages to other Facebook groups and organisations, where the content is not only of interest but also, importantly, relevant to them. This would also include the wider forestry industry and other allied bodies to promote more awareness of NCFed.
5. Sharing interesting posts from other Facebook groups onto our discussion group page, and where applicable to the main business Facebook page.

You will not be alone! There are two members of the Media and Marketing Sub-Committee (MAMSC) who can help with any queries or questions you may have. You will, however, be left very much to do your own thing but would be expected to update MAMSC a few times a year with just a short progress report, as well as between these occasions, updating the Directors and Coppice Group Reps at their occasional meetings.

Instagram

- Posting on the NCFed Instagram account will principally be about promoting and celebrating the work of our membership by sharing images they will have sent in showing their work, be it coppicing processes, coppiced material from the woods, green woodworking using coppiced timber etc.

For further information or expressions of interest please email mamsc@ncfed.org.uk

Features



Advice From a Worn Worker

As we get older, advice we received long ago can come back to haunt us. Andy Basham, describes some adaptations he makes now to keep working despite creaking joints.



image - Andy Basham

For those of us with knackered shoulders, and possibly elbows and wrists, and with safety in mind, I can heartily recommend working with the billhook in conjunction with a block of wood on legs, while trimming/working up etc. I enjoy the felling process greatly, (about two acres a year) but for me, working through my heaps and grading material into various products is the pinnacle of my occupation and I can't do enough. I don't enjoy bundling up so much and sometimes bring in casual labour to help with that.

To me, identifying products and slicing efficiently through green hazel with a billhook is a very absorbing and rewarding experience and one that I'd like to carry on with for as long as possible, I'm 62 so I'd like to at least reach my so-called retirement age in four years.

I usually have all my hazel in large but tidy heaps with all the butts one way of course, but pointing uphill so that the material is slightly lower when grasped than it would be if it were pointing downhill. After keyhole surgery on my shoulders, I've learnt to be careful flinging a billhook about above waist level and find keeping my work lower eases any tension in the muscles around the shoulder and keeps me working without having to reach for an icepack and Ibuprofen.

I use a willow or aspen block around 10" diameter 12" long, laid flat not end on, with three legs which are tenoned into 2" augered holes in the block, splayed naturally. This usually lasts a season and is sacrificial. As it wears away, hopefully any dirt falls off too. I only use it to 'back-up' any heavy blows made with force. I think a lot of joint problems stem from 'over extension' when the tool flies through unhindered until your tendons and ligaments have to stop it! The block stops it and of course acts as a shield. I always advise students to work on, and aim for, the far side of the block and never the ends where the billhook can deflect off easily into your kneecap (as I did with a hatchet at scout camp over 50 years ago).

Many old photos of woodmen show them using a stake driven in the ground as a chopping block. The split ends of these will harbour dirt and grit to dull your edge and there is all that extra effort retrieving your blade stuck in the end. Isn't this job hard enough? I reckon these guys would have knocked up a block as I have described if they'd had easy access to a large T-bar auger.

As most of us know, but it's worth repeating, if the tool's being flung at the material in a relaxed manner, using its weight, guiding it down and almost releasing as it penetrates the wood, jarring of the wrist and other joints will be minimised. In cold weather I use thermal, grippy gloves as they lessen the amount of work my fingers have to do, holding on to the billhook. You can work your way through larger material - 2" plus - with edge tools, but for efficiency and with sympathy for my joints, I use a compact triangular bowsaw. For thicker still a Stihl cordless chainsaw. This is not a recipe to follow, we all find a way that works for us, but I'm aware that anyone new to working with hand tools will need to be mindful of their physique otherwise pain and disappointment will follow, and we don't want that do we!?

Andy Basham, East Anglian Coppice Network.

Picture - Jacob using a side axe to point stakes. Note the brush to clean the block of dirt

Words From the Woods



It's raining, the Land Rover is being repaired (again), what should I do? I know; I'll write something for the NCFed newsletter – another contribution from my annals of useless information with a woody connection.

Many words and expressions in common usage today have their origins in our woodland heritage. Place names, people's names and numerous nouns and verbs have emerged and been assimilated into everyday language with their etymology being forgotten along the way.

We have some obvious names like Collier – (Char)coal-maker and some less obvious like Bradley – derived from brad meaning broad and 'leah' meaning woodland clearing. The humble (hazel) rod has been integrated into numerous phrases and expressions, 'dropping off to sleep' and 'beyond the pale' and 'keeping a tally' all have woodland backgrounds or connections. Our nickname for the common potato - the spud - also follows this well-worn route.

It is widely known that Sir Walter Raleigh imported potatoes in 1589. Raleigh apparently planted

them on his estate, Myrtle Grove near Cork, Ireland and before long they became a widespread staple of British life.

One incorrect theory of the link between potato and 'spud' comes from the acronym 'Society for the Prevention of and Unwholesome Diet' (SPUD) in the early 19th century. People regarded potatoes as something to be avoided because there were no references to the popular tuber in the Bible. Not being approved of in the Bible equated to Devil's food in some eyes. However this is a complete myth; there is no evidence that the society even existed! So, we need to look elsewhere.

By 1850 The Waterford Evening News published 'eating the 'spuds' or 'Murphys' only once in place of three times a day...'. This gives us a clear link but it goes back much further.



The word spud can be traced back to at least 1440 and comes from Spyd a Dutch/Danish word for a short sword used for digging. Obviously you need to dig to plant and harvest, using a spyd/spud/spade. Literary references to the spud as a spade include Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) in his Pastoral Dialogue (1728) – 'My spud these nettles from the stones can part'.

Rather than digging, the name may also come from the process of peeling. We know that the Incas of the Altiplano region used to peel their potatoes and we have various recipes from the 16th and 17th centuries that call for peeling. In the woodland world we have the 'spudding iron' used for peeling the bark (spud) from chestnut and more importantly oak for tanning leather. Anyone who has worked with oak or chestnut will know the effects of the tannin on the skin, but tanning is a whole separate story!

Given that tanning leather using oak bark goes back to Roman times in England and at least 3,500 BC elsewhere, it is certain that the process of removing/peeling/harvesting the bark was well established long before the 14th century. I understand that our only remaining traditional tannery is the world-renowned J.F.J Baker & Co Ltd in Colyton, Devon on a site used since Roman times. Apparently they still source their oak spud from Coppice Association North West. Long may it continue.

'Peel' is a Middle English word from the Latin 'pilare'. As a verb it means "to strip off - the skin, bark, or rind from...." but as a noun it has two meanings, both dating back to the late 14th century. First, a piece of rind, bark, or skin, but secondly, a wooden shovel with a broad blade and a long handle. Does that sound like a familiar description of a spudding iron?

We have no way of knowing whether 'peel' pre-dates 'spud', but from the 14th century it seems

'spud' and 'peel' were largely interchangeable until they settled with potatoes becoming 'spuds'. When you next have bangers and mash, the potato could as easily have been known as a peel as a spud! Definitely food, if not food for thought.

If there are any other woodland connected words or expressions you would like to draw to my attention, please just drop me a line.

John Sinclair - send your woodland words to John via news@ncfed.org.uk and we will forward them
Sussex & Surrey Coppice Group

Poles Apart? Woodland Owners and Coppice Workers

Judith Millidge, Editor of Living Woods Magazine and Co-ordinator of the Small Woodland Owners' Group writes



Small woodland owners sometimes get a bad press among professional foresters and woodland workers. Dismissed as urban dilettantes, playing Marie-Antoinette-like with new chainsaws in their small patches of woodland, they may seem more concerned with barbecues than brash, and appear to tread roughshod over generations of carefully sustained woodland environments.

Social media groups often magnify this. Newbie owners ask genuine questions on Facebook and other forums which may seem naïve to more practised woodlanders. Replies sometimes vary from the sarcastic and incredulous, to the helpful; in the former case, new owners retreat hurt and, more importantly, still ignorant.

Most owners of small or large woods, require professional help at some point and this is an opportunity to look at things from the owners' point of view and examine why a good relationship between owners and coppice contractors is good for everyone – especially our woodlands.

Who are they?

The UK's best-known purveyor of small woodlands, Woodlands.co.uk, knows its market. It is a family company which sells, by and large, to families and has helped a couple of thousand people realise their dream of owning a small piece of land that they can call their own. Yes, the company buys large patches of woodland to divide into smaller plots, but they also provide exceptional follow-up,

ensuring that new owners have the best possible start to woodland ownership, providing a grant for training, signing them up to a free owners' club (SWOG) and hosting gigabytes of video and articles on their website. Owners are encouraged to get to know one another and to work together on management projects. In short, the company tries to ensure that new owners are well-informed about woodlands and forestry.



In my experience as co-ordinator of the Small Woodland Owners' Group (SWOG), owners fall into two broad groups – young families and older couples. None of them approach their woodland purchase on a whim and they treasure their woodlands for the peace, space, and connection with nature. They genuinely want to pass on their woods in a better state than they found them.

What do owners do in their woods?

When it comes to management, most take it very seriously. For many (74% according to our research) this involves acquiring a chainsaw. But as owners come to study their woodlands, most realise that woodland management encompasses a variety of valuable techniques – and coppicing is one of the

oldest and most sustainable.

It is probably true to say that the craft of coppicing and its many benefits are not as widely known as other management techniques. Owners may be unsure about where to start and what to do with the arisings – or 'product' – short of burning it. Once the value of coppicing is explained, where does an owner turn for help?

Contracting and Communication

From an owner's point of view, contracting a coppice worker, once they've worked out where to find one, is not as straightforward as, say, dealing with a builder or plumber. Woodland owners may not understand the full extent of coppice workers' diverse skills or appreciate the many different uses of coppice timber.

Are owners paying the coppice worker to do the work or should the coppice worker pay to work a coupe? And what even is a coupe? Coppice workers may or may not charge a fixed rate; they may or may not want the product; estimating the time to do a job is not always straightforward. Fixing a time to do the work is often weather-dependent and can therefore be uncertain. These are not criticisms, just the perception from an owner's viewpoint.

Coppice workers and woodland owners all care about sustainable woodland management and the health of their woods, so how can we put coppice workers and woodland owners in touch and ensure that both sides find it a mutually satisfactory experience?

It seems to me to be all about clarity. A coppice 'code of conduct' might provide a structure for independent workers to use, with guidance on how to estimate and explain the work and charges to less experienced clients. It could include a template for the expectations of both sides. Owners need to understand that coppicing and related crafts are hard-learned professional skills that are a valuable part of woodland management.

Coppicing is one of the finest traditional crafts still alive today in the UK and it is in all our interests to make sure that it thrives.

Judith Millidge

Living Woods Magazine and SWOG are sponsored by Woodlands.co.uk

Building a Solar Wood Kiln



To buy a bandsaw mill and build a solar kiln has been high on my to do list over the last few years since I started my woodturning business. I've bought books and researched online and subsequently drawn up several possible designs. Various ideas have been rattling around my brain for a while and I've toyed with building from scratch, using a lorry back or a metal container or just polythene sheeting over a frame.

The basic idea of a solar kiln is to use a greenhouse arrangement on top of a sealed box to generate heat which is then circulated around the timber via 12volt car battery powered fans which speeds up the seasoning process and reduces the time needed to a few weeks instead of a year or more. The benefits of this is that it costs virtually nothing to run.

In December I finally had the funds available to order a bandsaw mill which I decided to import from China because of the cost saving, but due to the difficulties of the pandemic in China the delivery was delayed until April, which actually worked out well for me as I had shut the workshop due to the lockdown. As the initial restrictions were eased, I was able to get the mill assembled and started cutting up what timber I had in stock to make boards. I was also able to access a grant from *Natural Enterprise* through the *Solent Local Enterprise Partnership* which allowed me a match funded grant to build a kiln, buy a large flat bed trailer and a new chainsaw.



The final design for the kiln was a 4.8m long, 3m wide and 2.4m high box with a 60 degree pent roof for a solar collector. The latitude of the Isle of Wight is 50.69 degrees so, add 10 degrees to find the correct roof pitch to catch the most sunlight throughout the year. And it must of course be south facing.

The box was made from 4x4" corner posts with 3x2" stud work, clad inside with Stirling board ply over Cellotex insulation in the walls. The exterior was then clad with shiplap boarding over a polythene vapour barrier. The inside of the roof has been painted black to absorb heat, along with the exterior of the kiln.

I then needed a coating to waterproof the interior so that the ply doesn't soak up the moisture released from the wood whilst drying, so I used a waterproof, grey roofing paint. The pent roof solar collector has then been covered with a polythene polytunnel film.

A slight adaptation of my own was to add some controls for the fans. The fans are run from a PV solar panel and I've added some speed controllers for the fans as well as high/low thermostats to switch them off overnight and also if the temperature gets too high in the roof during the day. The total cost of building the kiln has been around £2000 but I will now have a ready supply of seasoned boards which I can use for making my products or sell through my shop.

If you are looking for information on solar kilns I can recommend 'Solar Lumber Kilns' by Jim Birkemeier or online www.timbergreenforestry.com or www.greenandgrowing.org/solar-kiln
Andy Fortune, The Mulberry Tree Wood Turnery
Andy is a member of the Isle of Wight Coppice Group



The Tree

A poem by Robert Smith

The Tree is a delightful poem which takes the reader along the journey of the four seasons, which the tree not only passes through but also witnesses and experiences. Read this poem not just once but twice, or even three times, to really appreciate it.

Robert Smith, who sadly is no longer with us, was a policeman for 33 years with Hampshire

Constabulary and adored being out on the beat in the fresh air and engaging with people. He grew up in the pastoral village of Powerstock, set amongst the rolling hills and combes of the West Dorset countryside. His upbringing clearly influenced his outlook on life and gave him a real appreciation of nature and the great outdoors, so much so, that he would jot down rural ramblings and poetic verse in his police notebook-something that the modern day copper wouldn't be permitted to do! I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

Tim Roskell

The Tree

Oh tree that stands so tall and free
I love your wondrous symmetry.
Green foliage and branches high,
Whose fingers reach into the sky.
As if to touch in ecstasy
The hand that once created thee.

Through fresh and sparkling days of spring
When through the woodland, bird calls ring
A trilling choir of tuneful flutes
To greet your fresh green budding shoots.

Through long warm days of summer heat
Your mantle of green becomes complete.
The rich green leaves that you have made
Providing man with welcome shade

Then autumn brings as days grow cold
Your glorious crown of red and gold
Which, then with every shortening day
Will slowly die and fade away.

As into winter cold and dark
Your black limbs stand so bare and stark.
A spectral figure, still as stone
Through bitter winds that sigh and moan.

Till once more the mighty wheel of Earth
Turns full circle and gives birth
To fresh green life upon your limb
That heralds yet another Spring.



Dorset Delights in Forestry England

Pete Etheridge describes his successful working relationship with Forestry England in Dorset.



image - Pete Etheridge

In response to Rob Newby's article in the previous edition of *Cleft Stick*, I'd like to take this opportunity to talk about my personal experience of working with Forestry England (FE); both as a commercial coppice worker and as a Director of Dorset Coppice Group (DCG). It is not my intention to contradict Rob or to pass judgement on his particular circumstances, but simply to relate the positive relationship that we enjoy with Forestry England and, in particular, our local Wildlife Manager, Mark Warn.

Dorset Coppice Group was formed in 1998 by a small group of coppice workers who wished to combine their efforts to raise the profile of coppicing within the county. In 2007, grant funding was obtained by the Group to build a 'Woodland Classroom' that could be used for training events and from which to run coppicing and green

woodworking courses. An agreement was reached with Forestry England that this could be built in an area of their woodland in the hills above Blandford Forum. Along with the Classroom, the Group also took on the lease of 25 acres of hazel coppice, which is being cut by the Group on an annual rotation. Volunteers who cut this coppice regularly use the materials, not just for Group purposes, but also for their own craft needs. In this manner, the woodland gets managed for the benefit of biodiversity and the general public, whilst also supporting small rural businesses. The Classroom itself is regularly hired out to a range of groups including schools, nurseries, special needs groups and the NHS; all of whom benefit from the advantages of connecting people with the woodland environment.

Mark Warn said: "In 2001 we instigated a total review of coppice management across the Wareham Beat and had a strong desire to increase the restoration of older un-worked coppice, whilst making existing commercial coppice areas more sustainable for wildlife and economic viability.

In 2004 we began working closely with DCG, based on our shared goal of helping to stimulate more interest in coppice management and increasing the availability of skilled coppice workers. This

partnership has made real progress with a huge advance in the overall area of coppice in rotation providing consistent opportunities for coppice workers, whilst at the same time delivering sustainable and wildlife rich habitat management. The enthusiasm and dedication of the DCG members has greatly increased FE's ability to enhance this valued element of woodland management and is a great example of successful partnership working”.



In 2019, Mark suggested to us the idea of ‘coppice allotments’. FE had a number of small hazel coupes (mainly scallops on the edges of rides) that were in need of coppicing to maintain their biodiversity value. In partnership with FE, we offered these to members (at a small fee) and we were delighted that all of them were taken up. This project has given several members the opportunity to ‘cut their teeth’ in coppicing and to procure small volumes of coppiced hazel for their own craft needs, as well as supplying bean poles and other products for sale to local communities. These have proven to be ideal first steps into the coppice industry.

In addition to the activities of the Group, several commercial coppice workers also buy standing in-cycle hazel & sweet chestnut directly from Forestry England in a number of local woodlands. This access to high quality hazel has been instrumental in building their coppice businesses. Indeed, I am confident in saying that some of the best quality hazel I have seen in Dorset is grown on FE land. The money that we pay, as commercial cutters, goes straight back into FE's coffers, helping them to manage the Public Forest Estate on behalf of us all. The open access nature of the woods also gives us the opportunity to engage with visitors – explaining to them the importance of the coppice cycle and the cyclical nature of woodland life. Several of these visitors have gone on to become Coppice Group (& NCFed) members.

Our relationship with Forestry England has, on the whole, been very positive. Yes, of course there have been slight divergences of views at times but we have worked these out. We feel strongly that our works complement each other and that Dorset Coppice Group would not be in the position it is in now without the support of FE. I for one would not be running a viable coppice business were it not for the access to hazel coppice, and the encouragement to cut it, that FE has provided. Ours is a relationship built on mutual trust and respect – long may it continue.

Pete Etheridge, Dorset Coppice Group

Obituary



Paul Henry Vodden

15 July 1949 - 1 October 2020



Paul lost his fight with a brain tumour on 1st October. His funeral was held on Thursday 22 October at Cam Valley Crematorium, Saffron Walden. I attended via the web cam link organised to enable his extended coppice family to attend the event in these Covid times.

Paul was born in Driffield, East Yorkshire but shortly afterwards his father's teaching job was moved to India so Paul's school days were spent there and one of his class mates was the late Freddie Mercury who Paul described as a colourful character even back then.

Due to a few more school moves Paul's formal education was a bit disjointed but he excelled in self education in what turned out to be his lifelong interest in natural history which was kicked off by the Doctor Dolittle and Gerald Durrell books. Paul, now back in the UK, left school at 15 and started work at the Yorkshire Flamingo Park. From there he moved to other zoos as a keeper, also having a five year spell at an Australian pig artificial insemination centre. Returning to the UK Paul went on to work for the RSPCA as an officer where a young secretary, called Caroline, caught his eye. In 1987 he went on to work for Greenpeace using his experience on captive whales to be instrumental in their free the whale campaign. Just after the birth of Alice it was decided that the best plan was for Paul to do full time stay at home dad (trend setter and ahead of his time) and Caroline the main bread winner. Following the tragic death of his son Ben in 2006 Paul became heavily involved in the charity Anti-Bullying Alliance and had three national level reports published which influenced the Government's modus operandi on school buses. In 2003 Paul undertook a City and Guilds forestry course at Plumpton College, East Sussex. He moved to Saffron Waldon, Essex in 2015.

Paul's wife, Caroline talked about this happy, dashing young man with a large motorbike at the RSPCA centre at which she had just started work. Her boss warned her off him as he did not want to lose a secretary to a broken heart (he was proved wrong in spades).

Caroline and Paul's holidays pre-children were travels on the motorbike through Europe, early travels with the children, now upgraded to a car, and after the children the upgrade to a motor home. Caroline talked about Paul's sense of humour, his lifelong learning and his support of other people's beliefs.

Paul - a personal reflection



I was introduced to Paul following a phone call from Mr Walters who phoned one evening to say a member of Surrey and Sussex Coppice Group, a fellow charcoal burner was moving from Sussex to Dorset for his wife to take up a pastoral calling as a new URC minister and please could I see him settled into Dorset Coppice Group. With Mr Walters showing this amount of interest I thought this must be somebody good so said "yes of course, but out of interest, which parish?" Alan said 'don't know, I will phone you back'. (Broadstone URC church had not had a minister for six months.) When Alan phoned back I knew he was going to say Broadstone as it took him 30 seconds to stop laughing.

Paul, Caroline, Alice and a dog called Rocky moved to Broadstone a few years ago and on the basis of two burners in the same village we declared it the UK charcoal capital! With his desire to share the knowledge he had in his new found career of coppicing, particularly the economic felling by Dave

Rosney and the ring kiln operation by Alan Walters, Paul quickly rose through the ranks and became a Board member of Dorset Coppice Group, who benefited from his committee and lobbying skills developed in his previous careers.

Paul had a kiln site at Hampreston which came to an end when the landowner put the tenanted farm and woodland up for sale so Paul moved to a wood at Ashington, a mere two miles from home which finished when the woodland owners divorced. I gave Paul a hand to roll kilns in and out of the woods on both occasions. Paul was now without a kiln site. He was cutting in-cycle hazel for stakes and binders and there was a vacancy for additional understorey cutting at Cranborne Estate. He moved his kilns onto Hithertill Copse.

Paul was under resourced on the vehicle front. The Land Rover cracked its engine block and the Kia Sportage only had road tyres. Some would say that's the pot calling the kettle black, but it led to our longest kiln roll; an eight footer uphill along a sixty acre field (less the first 30 foot before the Kia's

tyres filled up with brick earth clay) and then along the edge of a 15 acre wood with Paul's niece with a 5' 6" fencing stake acting as the hand brake. Now that Paul was burning in Hampshire he joined the Hampshire Coppice Group. As a member of three coppice groups along the south coast Paul believed in the aims of the NCFed and was uniquely placed to help take it forward. Initially he was Dorset's Rep and then a Director utilising his knowledge, from Brighton to Lyme Regis, of the woods and characters involved.

We cut in swathes independently but with total trust, working from both ends to the middle and then starting another swathe. We could recognise each other's cord wood stacks - Paul's were tidier. Returning to the Dorchester job, Paul needed to cut a lot more before it came into bud so one February with snow on the ground and me not fancying driving to Cranborne with two wheel drive, Paul suggested I come down to Dorchester in the Land Rover and cut a bit. We travelled in the light snow, unusual for Dorset, arrived as the sun was breaking through, but very much snow on the boughs. When harvesting, if one hazel hit the next you had your own private snow storm and I experienced the snow down the back of the neck, that the old boys talk about when harvesting. I would not have had that experience without Paul. Another memorable day was heading to Shaftesbury Agricultural Bygone Auction with a heavy box of odds in the boot. I forget what was up with Paul's car but mine had a slipping clutch and a mechanic away on holiday. On the hill just before Shaftesbury, Paul had his hand on the door handle ready to get out and walk. At the top he calmly said he didn't think we were going to make that and smiled.

Paul augmented his coppicing with jobbing gardening which he used as an opportunity to introduce proper bean poles and other coppice products into gardens in Broadstone. One final word: Dorset Coppice member Peter Moores remembers cutting with Paul at RSPB Reserve, Gurdlers Copse, near Sixpenny Handley and his hook was so sharp you could hear it sing when swung. Five years Paul, since you left Dorset and set up the East Anglian Coppice Network. You'll never be forgotten in Dorset.

Rest in Peace

Peter Jameson

Ed's note - latterly, Paul was instrumental in setting up the East Anglian Coppice Network. Although most of us hadn't had chance to get to know him very well, he had made a big impression. There's a tribute to him on the Network's web site - [here](#)

A Pint With...



..Louise Arthur

of Rough Around the Hedges in conversation with Cleft Stick



Hampshire based basket maker and teacher, Louise Arthur talks to Cleft Stick about her business, inspirations and experiences of Covid lockdown.

For how long have you been making baskets?

I started making rustic frame baskets ten years ago. I had made one basket with a local Chichester maker. He and his wife had run workshops at my childrens' primary school. Later I attended a frame basket "gypsy style" workshop in Devon while on a weekend break with a friend. Then I found a two-day course specifically about hedgerow materials and got hooked. Each year I went on another basketry course, including many fantastic Basketmakers' Association spring courses to broaden my knowledge and techniques. In 2017 I completed a City & Guilds taught by Eddie Glew, at Westhope College in Shropshire.

What still excites you about basketry?

No basket has ever been made by a machine; where there are baskets there are people and where there are people there have always been baskets. This often comes as a shock to beginners on courses. Yes there are knitting machines now, yes there are fabric and fibre weaving machines but there are no basket weaving machines. So each basket whether coiled, twisted, plaited or twined from any variety of material was made by a person somewhere in the world.



Does your basket making follow a particular technique?

I make and teach under the name “Rough Around the Hedges” with an aim of “weaving people and nature together”. I love teaching and making frame baskets especially simple two circle hoops with god’s eye or three-way lashings. My basketry crafts use native plant materials from the hedgerows, local or UK grown willow, rush, straw and bark.

I have been lucky enough to work for the Forestry Commission and Sustainability Centre, both in rural Hampshire. Here I have seen the powerful effect, on children and adults, of being outdoors, focusing on and learning about plants and wildlife and making the connection between a healthy environment and

our own health. My courses are as much about being aware of the plant material, how and where it is grown, any benefits to wildlife and how it is sustainably harvested as they are about technique.

What do you mean by sustainability?

Sustainability is often taught as a balancing act between ‘Society, Environment and Economy’. When teaching children I often use easier terms borrowed from permaculture ‘People care, Earth Care and Fair Share’. It is the desire to encompass all three aspects equally that underpins much of my work. I focus on products that help wildlife, take people outdoors or promote a healthy relationship between people, plants and animals. I encourage sustainable foraging and slow seasonal crafting. I do love to know the history and traditions of making certain baskets and think it is really important to pass this cultural knowledge on.

What about slow crafts?

Slow crafts and the idea of slow living are often seen as part of the sustainability movement. I happen to be quite a slow maker but it isn’t about the speed of your work or your productivity levels. Slow crafts are those that have the potential to offer a therapeutic benefit by the repetitive, meditative or mindful nature of them.

I am a beekeeper and I often talk of entering ‘bee time’ a state where hours seem to slip away as you observe, focus and attend to your bees. Basket weaving offers the same opportunity to hone patience and get lost in the rhythms of manual activity. The value of an item shifts from one of commercial sales to the benefits of the process. Realising a basket might take eight hours to make should add to its value not detract from it. Finally there is you the maker who might love to work on your own ‘lost in the weave’ of a project that needs to be sold at a fair price to respect the time and skill you’ve invested. If you looked at a yearly cycle of growing, harvesting, preparing materials, making, using and repairing a basket you start to see a slower longer process.

How has the 2020 lockdown affected your work?

In early March, on a beautiful spring day, I taught a morning willow workshop followed by an afternoon rush workshop for the Surrey Wildlife Trust at one of their nature reserves. Little did I know

this was the last group of people I'd teach for months. I've had a dozen workshops cancelled or postponed by various hosting venues. As this is a large part of my income I've had to turn my attention to my making for sales rather than creative expression. For the past three months I've been furloughed from my two day a week job teaching school children who visit the Sustainability Centre. Luckily this means I have had all my time to focus on making. When I realised this interruption was going to last longer than I originally thought I researched other makers' prices, set up a small shop on my Facebook page, grabbed a local commission and started selling online through social media and posting from my village post office. I had to adapt quickly. I've put my mind to neglected business skills and this will serve me well in the long run.

The allotment, chicken, bees, garden, dog and cooking have had more attention than usual. I've seen more of my husband than in the last five years. There have been some great laughs but there have been down days, fearful nights, crisis points and family losses too. Through it all I've had my connection to nature to calm me, reassure me and continue to inspire me.

Terry's Top Tips



Emergency Plans and What3Words



What3words has divided the globe into 3m squares and given each one a unique 3 word address. It means everywhere can be located with just three words. For example kite.chats.dine will take you to a precise spot in a field next to the River Ouse in York. What3words is available as a free app for [iOS](#) and [Android](#) and online map at map.what3words.com. You can find out more about what3words [here](#).

We've just added What3words to emergency plans for our work sites. I became aware of it last year, but only built it into our plans when I found out that Bedfordshire emergency services are using it themselves. How to describe the exact location of a site entrance, on a featureless roadside without a post code is a perennial issue that has caused me concern over the years. We carry laminated sheets showing maps and written directions to the sites and these now include What3words. Everyone new to a site has these explained to them and they will now include mention of What3words. It might render redundant a red ribbon we tie to the entrance gate when working at the site, to distinguish it from other similar gates nearby,

It feels like, in an emergency, it would be clearer to say "kite chats dines" than quote an 8 figure grid reference along with a verbal description. We have all options ready in the plan, kept in the vehicle and fortunately we haven't had to try it for real.

Guy Lambourne, East Anglian Coppice Network

Tried & Tested



Portable Phone Battery Charger

The Taurus X4L Smart Power by Imuto



Relax everyone, you haven't just logged on to the Techno Geeks' Weekly by mistake! This is a great bit of kit whether you're out in the woods, on the road, on site carrying out an installation, in your workshop or (who knows when!) at a festival or event promoting your business.

This is a high capacity, portable charger/power pack which can easily charge an average smart phone at least four times and still have some charge left! It can also charge laptops, tablets and other devices. There are two USB ports allowing two devices to be charged at the same time. Both of these ports will detect your device intelligently when you connect them and then automatically charge your device/devices at the highest speed possible.

Re-charging of the power pack is via the Micro USB cable supplied and this can be connected to your computer for an overnight charge. Inevitably, the pack does get quite warm as it is charging-this is quite normal apparently. You can also use a suitable USB mains adaptor (I used my Iphone plug).

Re-charging my flat Iphone battery to reach a 50% capacity took 40 minutes. The next 20% (i.e.70% total capacity) took a further 30 minutes and the final 30% (i.e. to fully charged) took a further half hour. So re-charge time was 2 hours and 10 minutes.

Along with the USB charging cable, it is also supplied with a fairly basic pouch to store the pack. One very handy additional feature is the integral LED flashlight which is a nice touch. Choice of colours is pretty limited-two! Either black with a gold coloured band or white with a red band.

Unlike other charging power packs, you can see the exact remaining power left in the pack (shown as a % figure) which coupled with the high 20,000 mAh rating will generally mean longer run time than its cheaper, lower rated competitors.

Ok, the down side is that it's quite a heavy bit of kit weighing in at 411grams (14.5oz in old money) and some would say recharging the actual power pack is a bit slow, but don't let these points put you off. Just look at what it has to offer! It's saved my bacon a few times when my phone battery was all but flat, with a broken charging point in my truck (since repaired!), no other means of charging the phone and trying to continue with an urgent ongoing call to a client!

Expect to pay about £20.00 to £25.00 for this excellent bit of kit.

Tim Roskell

