

RAWNSLEY WOODLAND PRODUCTS

Newsletter No 1

Autumn 04

Welcome to the first RWP Newsletter.

We thought it might be a good idea to keep our friends and customers, old, new and potential, up to speed with what is happening in the Woods, the Yard, the Workshop, the ideas behind the project, how they are moving and developing and, most importantly, to let you all know about the things we are producing.

The Solar Wood Drying Kiln

This spring we realized a long held ambition to build a functional and efficient Solar Kiln. Following much research, a trip to Wisconsin to see Jim Birkemeier's great kilns, and interminable (it seemed) wrangling with planners we finally did it.



The Solar Wood Drying Kiln

A huge thank you to all those who helped, with encouragement, labour, knowledge and financially including Jim Birkemeier, Working Woodlands, Woodland Heritage, SW Forest, SWARD, Cornwall County Council and Duchy of Cornwall Woodlands.

Over the winter, with the stalwart help of a trusty band of volunteers and the invaluable assistance of ace shipwright Fran Browne, who kept the figures and measurements clear in his head, we made a start, while I ran around like a headless chicken organizing materials and equipment.

We cleared the ground and laid the concrete base in late November and apart from a couple of hairy nights wrestling polystyrene insulation in a full gale (the site is pretty exposed) the build went swiftly. The solar collector was covered and we were ready to load our first charge by mid February, a mixed bag of species, Ash, Oak, Beech, Sycamore and Cherry. The Spring was dry and sunny and by mid May we were able to open up the chamber and we were delighted to find that we had an average moisture content of less than 10% (starting out at

22%mc +). The Kiln really worked! The wood was dry, stable, and well behaved with a lot less degrade than expected.

Much of the Ash from this load was used for a large staircase by local joiner David Hutchins. David was very happy with the wood and is usually first to check out what's in the kiln loads we have had since then.

Our next load again had a mix of species including some ¼ sawn Turkey Oak which although notorious for moving as it dries has stayed flat and stable. We also dried Holly, Ash, Poplar and plenty of Beech, much of it from a magnificent tree from the Pencarrow Estate, which yielded board after board of splendid coloured wood, streaked with rich tans and chocolate flames.

So come and have a look before it all gets snapped up.



Charlie with the massive Beech from Pencarrow

The Workshop

Due to the time spent getting the yard up and running, the workshop was rather quiet for a while with a few tables, and just a handful of chairs coming out. But now we are at 'full steam' again with Fran working on an interesting 'round' kitchen in that glorious Pencarrow Beech and some special pieces for the upcoming CSBT expo.

While I have been working on a new repeatable design of chair made from a single stem of 7 year-old Sycamore coppice. It seemed to make sense seeing as we have so much of the stuff down here.

Western Red Cedar

The very first load of saw logs received at the yard was just about this time last year. It was a fine stack of Western Red Cedar from the Duchy of Cornwall, which we rapidly turned into shingles for a small building made by Colin Milburn for the Cornwall Hospitals Trust. It turned out very well and Colin was pleased with the shingles. Since then we have been cutting a lot of this great material for cladding and shingles. We roofed the 'Forestry Barn' at the Royal Cornwall showground, some of which we did during the Show, which drew a lot of attention.



Tim Wade's Forestry Barn with our shingles.

Recently we have been working closely with The Cornwall Sustainable Buildings Trust and Bill Dunster Architects of Bed ZED fame on a couple of Projects they are doing in the county.

This spring, we went the whole hog and are now fully certified as FSC 'chain of custody' suppliers and so can offer FSC certified, locally grown Western Red Cedar shingles and cladding including a wide variety of planed and sawn profiles.

So the Western Red Cedar has been our star product and has kept food on the table and the mill busy. The Duchy of Cornwall are happy and we are too.

Back to the Woods

As the cutting season gets underway we will be getting back to our work in the woods. Last winter we made great strides in Brockton Wood, opening up areas choked by Sycamore and Honeysuckle. Many young trees had been attacked by grey squirrels causing terrible damage so we got to trapping the little blighters and caught a good hand-full of them. It was a great joy to see at last a wonderful carpet of bluebells where we had worked.



Bluebells at Brockton

The hedges and the under-wood gave us a good few loads of charcoal as well. Meanwhile, over at Lesnewth, we did a 30% 'crown thin' of the Sycamore and again were rewarded, this time with early purple orchids where none had been seen before.

Though working outside through the long dark wet Cornish winter can be a slog, sitting, during a break eating my pasty and watching a young doe run along the ridge, with winter sun filtering through the trees, I know I have the best job in the world.

Future Projects

As ever RWP is working on developing the next projects to make the set-up more sustainable and closer to the ideal of a zero waste 'Whole system', providing livelihoods and interacting with the woodland in a positive and beneficial way for all members of the biotic community. To this end we were involved, last spring, with planting a new 17-hectare mixed deciduous woodland, at Ladock.

We have been working on a woodland fungi project to inoculate logs and chipped woodland waste with edible mushrooms and have had some success with Shitake.



Shitake on Oak logs

We have also been experimenting with a spore-bearing chainsaw oil that inoculates the woodland with desirable species of saprophytic and mycorrhizal fungi, hopefully providing future crops of delicious mushrooms and also assisting the woodland in assimilating nutrients and providing 'disease vectors' against such damaging species as Honey Fungus.

Another linked project is a Sawmill Waste Composting System where sawdust and chippings are rapidly aerobically/ anerobically composted providing a range of outcomes from heat, to add to the kiln in winter, to biogas, mushroom medium, plant food and rich compost. All this in addition to reducing the volume of waste output by 50%.

SO WATCH THIS SPACE!

For more on any of the above or if you would like further information on the things we make and do please have a look at the website at

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