

The Windrow

Newsletter of The Scythe Association of Britain and Ireland

No 9 February 2015

Haymaking in Transylvania see pp 12-13



Summer Holiday Special

Scything and Haymaking Holidays
in Romania, the Czech Republic
and Norway.

This Newsletter is produced by SABI
The Scythe Association of Britain and Ireland
<http://scytheassociation.org/>
THE NEXT ISSUE WILL APPEAR IN MAY 2015
PLEASE SEND ANY EVENTS YOU NEED LISTED,
OR ANY OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS TO
chapter7@tlio.org.uk
BY 20 APRIL

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The Windrow 9

The Eleventh West Country Scythe Festival and Green Fair

ENTRY
£10 Per Car
£2 for
Cyclists
and Walkers

SUNDAY
14 JUNE



Thorney Lakes,
Muchelney,
Langport,
Somerset,
TA10 0DW

Parking and Camping
on Site

SATURDAY 13 JUNE

Beginners' and improvers'
scything instruction, plus
workshops on peening,
grassland management,
haymaking etc.

Scythe Championship
Team Mowing • Haymaking •
Scything Instruction • Crafts Stalls
• Scythes for Sale • Tools and Tat •
Green Things • Campaigns •
Kid's Area — Hay for Play
Speakers • 2 Music Stages • Ceilidh
Organic food • 2 Bars

More information: 01297 561359 chapter7@tlio.org.uk
www.thescytheshop.co.uk/festival.html ; <http://www.greenfair.org.uk>

Eighth Eastern Counties Scythe Festival

Wimpole, Herts 27-28 June

A fun weekend on the National Trust Wimpole Estate.
The only event in the UK where you can compete in competitions varying from 5mx5m right up to a quarter of an acre.

Demonstrations of blacksmithing, sheep shearing, green-wood working and other rural crafts.

Camping is available and there are spaces for stallholders (free if you demonstrate, otherwise there is a small fee).

For more information go to <http://sadeik.wordpress.com/walks/scything-festival/> or email Simon.Damant@nationaltrust.org.uk

Wimpole Practice Sessions

Wimpole Estate, Cambs SABI members are invited to join our informal mowings during June and July. We plan to meet on Tuesday evenings.

For information contact Jim McVittie dalefield@ntlworld.com

Wimpole Scything Course

On the first day of the Scything festival - Saturday 27 June 2015. See page 3



Team Mowing at Wimpole

February 2015

INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

Transylvanian Hay Festival

9-16th August See pages 12-13

Kosení: Czech Republic

First two weeks of July See pages 7-9

Rhigsetra Norway

9-12 July, see pages 10-11

Trim Haymaking Festival

Co Meath Ireland

Sunday 21 June 2014. Now in its 47th year this festival includes a mowing competition, and other events, including a "roll in the hay" competition where couples compete tasks tied together with hay rope.

<http://www.trimhaymakingfestival.com>

International Peening Day April 5th
Easter Sunday

This is an 'everywhere event' which takes place each year over the first weekend in April. The idea is to encourage scythesfolk to recover their blades from storage and to clean, peen and sharpen their scythes in enthusiastic readiness for the coming mowing season.

Lawns should be in full growth by this time and lush meadows will benefit from a light topping: both ideal for setting up and testing scythes.

As part of this Richard Brown is planning a Scything refresher, peen and set up session on the Saturday 4th on his home meadow and Lawn in Norfolk PE34 4PL. Anyone is welcome to come along. He will be on hand throughout the day to give free advice on mowing, peening or set up to anyone who needs a refresher to set them and their scythe up for the summer. See SABI emails and facebook for updates and contact details.

Stockport Festival

28 June. Scythe demonstrations etc.

For information contact Jez: jeremyhastings@me.com

SABI NEWS

The Scythe Association's winter gathering was held on 24-25 January at Richard Brown's seaside beach house at Heacham, Norfolk. The winter gathering is a more relaxed and stimulating affair than the AGM (which is held in the hectic environment of the West Country Scythe Fair) and provides a forum where we can discuss scythe-related topics at leisure. We also get to eat the fruit of last year's mowing in the form of home-cured lamb, home-produced cheese etc.

Amongst the subjects discussed were:

- the continued promotion of the scythe, for example through Flora Locale's training packs, and through John Lett's range of heritage flours.
- holding next year's event at Abbeydale scythe mill, near Sheffield;
- equipment issues, including a change in snath design (more holes for the left hand grip), a replacement for Bregenzer stones (see p 5) and our experience with Italian Falci blades (not brilliant).

This year we also mowed the reeds in the saltmarsh right outside Richard's door, which is managed under an environmental stewardship grant. Chris Riley brought along some good quality willow, and even better quality tarred hemp twine, and explained how to attach a simple bow to the blade (see photos right).

SABI wishes to thank Ian Forman of York for a donation of £50, which was his payment for some scythe work, mowing a Natural Burial Ground for Rufforth and Knapton Parish Council.



Roman Holiday

John Hardy has sent us a delightful account of how the Friends of Brading Roman Villa, on the Isle of Wight, discovered the scythe this summer. After an afternoon's tuition at one of the friend's smallholdings "cutting grass with coffee and cakes", they tackled a rough patch full of brambles and stingers, which they piled into the haystack pictured above, and which they will use to mulch their recently planted vines and cobnuts. Encouraged by their success they then mowed the good grass in the rest of the field, made their own baler (right), and donated the baled hay to the local donkey sanctuary.

You can read the whole story on the SABI website at <http://scytheassociation.org/2015/02/07/hay-making-at-brading-roman-villa/>



Fitting the bow, mowing, and stacking the reeds at the Heacham Saltings.



OFFERS OF EMPLOYMENT

Summer Smallholding / Hay Making Apprenticeships

From mid - June to end August we will be making hay by hand at the Dyfed Permaculture Farm Trust, SW Wales. Volunteers are welcome to stay and work with us. A great opportunity to experience hand farming. Food and basic accommodation provided, stays of 1 to 6 weeks.

See www.scythecymru.co.uk for more info or contact Phil Batten or Michelle Lainé 07813 464990, scythecymru@yahoo.co.uk.

Summer Haymaking Job – Dorset

Assistant haymaker and general worker required for our small farm at Monkton Wyld Court, West Dorset, from 15 May to 15 August.

No previous scything experience necessary, you will be given instruction – but you need to be competent with hand tools, fit, dynamic, able to manage volunteers, and willing to work unusual hours. Haymaking during good weather. Bad weather work includes dairy cow management, cheese-making, scythe packing and general farm work. Also helping prepare for the West Country Scythe Festival. You will be fed, lodged, given a complete scythe set, and receive wages by arrangement.

For more information please email Simon giving previous work experience at chapter7@tllo.org.uk

Mini Apprenticeship - Dorset

Volunteers wanted for ten days or so scything, haymaking etc at Monkton Wyld Court, Dorset. You are instructed, fed, lodged and come away with a free scythe.

For more info ring Simon on 01297 561359 or email chapter7@tllo.org.uk

TRAINING COURSES

* Teachers marked with an asterisk usually have scythes for sale.

Steve Tomlin* and Neil Diment — Co Durham

Learn to Mow with an Austrian Scythe, Friday 3rd July

An introductory course for beginners and improvers, to be held on the Demesne meadow, Barnard Castle, Co. Durham.

Course fee: £40 (A 50% subsidy on the full cost thanks to the Heart of Teesdale landscape partnership project's support.) Priority will be given to those prepared to offer a day's voluntary mowing in this and future years to help the 'Friends of the Demesne Meadow' achieve its aim of restoring the meadow.

To book, please contact: Neil Diment e: neil@ndiment.co.uk t: 01833 638263

Andrea Gilpin - Powys

Courses for beginners and improvers.

Saturday 16th May, at Wild Meadow, Presteigne, Powys, www.wildmeadow.co/scything-classes/ £50

Saturday 6th of June also at Wild Meadow £50

Courses also offered further afield.

hello@wildmeadow.co www.wildmeadow.co/scything-classes/ 01544 267039

Philip Batten* - S Wales

Dyfed Permaculture Farm Trust, Carmarthenshire.

Introductory Scythe Courses: Saturday 23rd May, Saturday 4th July, Sunday 2nd August Wednesday 19th August

Peening and Sharpening Workshops: Tuesday 14th April, Saturday 11th July

NEW Tai Chi Mowing Workshop, Saturday 11th July - Sunday 12th July (can be combined with a peening workshop on 11th July).

07813 464990, scythecymru@yahoo.co.uk, www.scythecymru.co.uk

Andi Rickard* - Somerset

(Reigning ladies champion) Courses for beginners and improvers (including some peening workshops) every week from mid May 2015 at Mower Meadow near Wellington on the Somerset / Devon border. Andi is also available to teach groups and individuals offsite in Somerset and the neighbouring counties, and has scythes for sale.

Email andirickard@me.com or call 0758 1239453

Simon Fairlie* - Dorset

Courses on scythe use, plus grassland management and hay-making, at Monkton Wyld Court, on the Dorset/Devon border.

Two day Saturday to Sunday afternoon, with introduction Friday evening. B and B on site. Both days recommended, but you can choose to attend Saturday only (beginners), or Sunday only (improvers):

22-24 May 2014
10-12 July 2014
4-6 September 2014

For info: www.thescytheshop.co.uk or chapter7@tlio.org.uk; To book: www.monktonwyldcourt.co.uk/, or tel 01297 560342

Mark Allery*, W Sussex/Surrey

Sat 16th May and Sat 11th July- Learn to Mow with a Scythe - Weald and Downland Open Air Museum, Chichester, W Sussex.

Sat 6th June and Tuesday 8th September — Learn to Mow with a Scythe - Transition Guildford/Surrey Wildlife Trust, Guildford.

Sunday 5th July (tbc) - learn to Mow with a Scythe - Mere Barn Meadow, Lynchmere (Nr Haslemere), W Sussex.

Sun 2nd August, New Course: Mowing with a Traditional English Scythe - Weald and Downland Open Air Museum, Chichester, West Sussex We plan to have a blacksmith on hand experienced at using, setting up, adjusting and repairing English blades (forged and riveted); plus access to the museum's collection of English Scythes.

Mark offers short introductory lessons for people when buying a scythe from him in Lynchmere at £20 for a one hour setup and introduction, and one-to-one sessions on a case by case basis.

For courses at the Weald and Downland Open Air Museum contact the museum on 01243 811021, www.wealddown.co.uk/learn/adult-learning/

For courses at Transition Guildford contact John Bannister on 01483 570468 or Mark@woodlandantics.com or on 01428 641708 or via <http://woodlandantics.wordpress.com>.

For the course in Lynchmere, West Sussex please contact Mark directly.

Simon Lamb — Suffolk

Learn to scythe. Saturday 4th July 2015, 10am - 4/4.30 pm, Fee: £65 per person

Venue: Ling's Meadow, Stanton Road Farm, Hepworth, IP22 2PR ,

01359 250594, info@lingsmeadow.co.uk, <http://lingsmeadow.co.uk/blog/2015/01/12/learn-to-scythe/>

Beth Tilston* - E Sussex

Courses for individuals and for organisations.

Contact me (via my website) if you're an organisation who would like me to come to you to teach you scything.

www.learnscything.com

Chris Riley (N Dorset)*

Available for scythe training in the Wessex area. I will be holding training days in Gloucestershire on 20th May, 20th June, 25th August, and 12th September.

Dates of courses in SSomerset and Bristol TBA

chris@pratensis.net 07719 691312

Brighton*

Two day course with tutors: Simon Fairlie, Stefan Gehrels 22-23 August, Cost: £80-£200 (depending on income)

Brighton Permaculture Trust, Stanmer Park, Brighton BN1 9PZ www.brightonpermaculture.org.uk

Steve Tomlin* — Cumbria

Steve provides training in the Northern English counties, and sells scythes, but has not arranged his dates yet — except see top left with Neil Diment.

steve-tomlin@hotmail.co.uk <http://stevetomlincrafts.wordpress.com/learn-to-scythe/>

Clive Leeke* - Berks, Herts and London

Giving beginner's courses this summer in Oxford, Hungerford, Ealing, Hackney and Tower Hamlets; dates TBA. Sells scythes.

clive@austrianscythes.co.uk www.austrianscythes.co.uk/

Richard Brown* - Norfolk

Botanist, ecologist and seedsman offers scythe courses and tuition by arrangement and sells scythes.

richardjbrown556@gmail.com

Masterclass at the West Country Scythe Festival

11-13 June, at Muchelney, Langport Somerset

The definitive course for

- mowers with some experience who want to perfect their skills;
- team leaders managing volunteers or staff;
- people who want to teach scythe use to others.

The teachers are Christiane Lechner, scythe and yoga teacher from Austria; Phil Batten master peener from Scythe Cymru, <http://scythecymru.co.uk/> and Steve Tomlin from Scytherspace <http://stevetomlincrafts.wordpress.com/scythes/>

The venue is at Thorney Lakes. Muchelney, near Langport <http://www.thorneylakes.co.uk/>

The cost is £165 for individuals, £190 for organizations. Meals are provided. Camping on site is available

For a programme and other information please see <http://www.thescytheshop.co.uk/festival.html> To book, email Simon at chapter7@tlio.org.uk tel 01297 561359

Beginners' and Improvers' Course at the West Country Scythe Festival

Saturday 13 June, Muchelney, Langport Somerset

Supervised by Simon Fairlie, Christiane Lechner, Steve Tomlin and Phil Batten.

Scythe use, set up, sharpening and maintenance in the morning. A choice of workshops, including peening, grassland management, haymaking and English scythe use in the afternoon. Trainees are divided into two groups, beginners and improvers, Price: £50.

To book, email Simon at chapter7@tlio.org.uk tel 01297 5613

Training at the Eastern Counties Scythe Festival

On the first day of the Scything festival - Saturday 27 June 2015. Cost is £60 per person. The course is always popular so early booking is recommended. Tel.: 0844 249 1895 (7 days a week 9am–5.30pm) or book online by following the link in <https://sadeik.wordpress.com/blog/about/mowing/>

The Whetstone Hills

by Simon Fairlie



Look after your scythe stones, folks, because some of them may not be around much longer. There were once dozens of quarries in Britain, and many more throughout Europe, producing whetstones specifically for scythesmen. One by one they disappeared until now there are none at all produced in the UK, and just a handful in Europe, and some of

these are under threat.

The Bregenzer stones that have been coming into Britain over the last ten years are sourced from stock bought up by Schröckenfux after the quarry went bust. This stock is nearly exhausted, so soon there will be no more Bregenzer stones.

More worrying is the possibility that the Rozsutec works in Slovakia will close down when Lubomir Krivos, who runs it single-handedly, retires, since his son is not interested in taking over. The Rozsutec is now the finest natural stone available in Europe, with a grain size of only

two microns (grit size F1500), the same as the Japanese Karasu and Awasi Toshi stones, and finer than any Arkansas stone. It also has a very hard matrix binding the grains together which means that it does not wear away quickly. The grains themselves are graded at hardness 7, the same as quartz.

This is a unique stone and if the quarry is in danger of closing, mowers, woodworkers and others who use Rozsutecs need to impress upon the Slovakian government that this is a resource of international importance which needs to be safeguarded.

Incidentally the Rozsutec grit size of F1500 is measured on a scale used for grading whetstones which is *not* the same scale as that used for grading sand paper — P60, P120, P240 etc. The finest sandpaper available is P2500 (8.4 microns) which is roughly equivalent to F700, and has grains about 4 times as large as the Rozsutec. To make matters more complicated there is also an American scale (American National Standards Institute), which perversely is only slightly different from the European P scale, and a Japanese scale (Japanese Industrial Standard) which is



Rozsutec Whetstones



Clockwise from bottom left: (1) Lubomir Krivos, Slovakia's last whetstone fabricator, who makes them single handedly; (2) stone slabs dug put of the mountain with a shovel; (3) a small bench saw for making (4) blanks; (5) the finished product.





Sketch, 1854, bearing the legend: "Mode of trimming Whetstones for Scythes on the Whetstone Hills, Punchey Down and one of the entrances onto the side of the hill. This passage entered 300 yards horizontally." The quarries lie above Blackborough, near Collumpton and the coarse whetstones were known as Devonshire Batts. From *Devon's Non-Metal Mines*, by Richard Edwards, Halsgrove, 2011;.



The workshop in the Vallée de Saurat, Ariège, where French Pyrenean whetstones are quarried and fashioned. There is a two-minute video of the process at http://www.ariegenews.com/ariège/actualites_economie/2012/47414/saurat-dernier-bastion-de-la-pierre-a-aiguiser-naturelle.html

completely different. This means that the grit measurements I have been providing for the stones supplied on on the scytheshop .co.uk website are incorrect.

This technical information, and a great deal more on the subject of whetstones, can be found in a remarkable on-line publication by Dutchman Henk Bos called *Grinding and Honing*, which he has helpfully translated into slightly broken but nearly always comprehensible English. The four-part book is extensively illustrated with diagrams, and photos. Part 3 comprises reports and photos of visits to 30 or so European whetstone quarries, both working and abandoned, including the photos of the Rozsutec works reproduced here. British quarries covered include Charnley Forest and Moughton (N England), Water of Ayr, Tam O'Shanter and Dalmore stone (Scotland) and

Gwespyr, Dragon's Tongue and Llyn Idwal stones (Wales). Visits are planned to further quarries including the defunct Bregenzer quarry in Austria.

I was introduced to Henk Bos's work by Steve Leppold, who also sent the *Windrow* a description of the manner of fabricating whetstones with picks, hammer and wedges from an 1811 book by John Farey on the agriculture and minerals of Derbyshire. Rozsutec stones are sawn, as are the French stones pictured above, but the Bregenzers and Mailanders are riven, and Farey explains how it used to be done (see box below).

Henk Bos' *Grinding and Honing* is at <http://bosq.home.xs4all.nl/> The pdfs are big files, especially part 3.

Many thanks to Steve Leppold for directing me to much of this information.

How to Cleave a Whetstone

The dexterity displayed in cleaving out and forming the Scythe stones the process of which I examined in Morley Moor Quarries, is rather surprising. The workmen use very sharp-pointed Picks which require sharpening every quarter of an hour and a number of very small Wedges and a Hammer. A proper block of stone being selected, two or three of these small Wedges are set in in a row by gentle blows of the Hammer which are successively repeated until the stone splits in two by a straight and plane joint; the Wedges are then set into this new face in a straight line and the stone cleaved again; a race or nick being first scratched with the point of the Pick, where the Wedges are to enter, when the pieces grow slender, and in this way the subdivisions are continued until a piece remains large enough to make two Scythe stones, each 1 inch square and 11 or 12 inches long; this stone the workman holds nearly upright in his left hand and with the point of his Pick traces a deep nick down the middle of first one side and then the other and then by a slight blow with the point of his Pick in the nick it is separated into two rough Scythe stones which is so dexterously performed that seldom more than three or four are broken in the 120, in cleaving.

Those intended for round Rubbers are then reduced to an octagon nearly by the point of the Pick and are then handed over to women and boys who grind or rub them with water in a notch in a hard stone until quite round the square ones are ground in like manner on a flat stone and have their arriss taken off, and the ends ground flat and to

the proper length when they are sold at 10s per long hundred 120 and the same at Little Eaton Common. At Harthill Quarry Yorkshire they are made 11 inches long and sold the square ones at 10s and the round ones at 12s per hundred 122.

At Alton in Ashover considerable numbers of Scythe sticks used formerly to be made by collecting the sharp Sand from the decomposed surface of the 3rd Rock and glueing it on to flat pieces of Wood with a handle at the end these kinds of sticks for sharpening of Scythes are now made or covered with coarse Emery powder at Melbourn in the South of the County.

General View of the Agriculture and Minerals of Derbyshire, John Farey, 1811



I can find no illustration of the Derbyshire whetstone quarries in action. This is Alice Grace, a hermit who lived in a bacon box in the Little Eaton quarries at the turn of the 20th century.

Kosení Camp, Czech Republic

by Charis Frederickx of the Belgian Zeisteam

Since 1980, bands of volunteers have been coming to the annual Kosení mowing and hay-making camp, in the White Carpathian region of the Czech Republic, near the Slovak Border. At the two week mowing party/scythefest, over 37 acres of species-rich grasslands are currently managed the traditional way.

According to Peter Vido this “may well be the longest-standing example of specific employment of the scythe in preserving – and encouraging the return to the former level of – the biodiversity of flowering meadows.”

The White Carpathian Region

The White Carpathian Mountain range in eastern Moravia is a mosaic of rolling hills and stream valleys, stretching along the Czech/Slovak border. Its patchwork of species-rich meadows surrounded by vast forests harbours a rich biodiversity, including rare species of butterflies, spiders and orchids. This diversity owes much to the local pastoral farming tradition of making one hay cut in mid-summer and maintaining low-density livestock grazing in the autumn.

After World War II intensive agricultural exploitation badly affected the grasslands and since the 1980's, farming communities have declined because of a crisis in agriculture. Nowadays, the White Carpathian meadows have tens of thousands of legal owners, who have inherited their family's small plots. Since many of them no longer live in the area and the borders of individual plots are often difficult to establish, meadow management has become a challenging problem for nature conservationists.

History of the Kosení Camps

The yearly practice of maintaining the steep flower-rich hayfields by means of the scythe was revived at the end of the Seventies by the so-called “Tramps”. As far as we understand, they were a group of outcasts committed to an ecological lifestyle. They lived in self-built sheds in the woods and formed some sort of “tribe”. After some years biology students joined in for the yearly mowing.

In the earlier years only men attended the annual mowing and haymaking event. But one year along came seven Slovakian ladies. The scythesmen were enchanted by their siren-like singing and graceful moves. From then on, the camp was open for women though only in recent years have women been mowing as well. Previ-



ously they were consigned to the rake, the hayfork and the kitchen.

The camp is now run by Kosenka, a grassroots organization focusing on both cultural heritage and nature restoration and conservation. Kosenka also runs an Ecological Centre focusing on the preservation of local crafts and culture, and offering environmental activities and educational programs.

Camp Organization

The camp normally takes place in the first two weeks of July. Most volunteers stay for one to three days at the camp, while a hard core stays the whole fortnight. Each day about 30 volunteers are present, resulting in a total of over 150 different people visiting the camp throughout the fortnight. Most volunteers are from the Czech or Slovak Republics, but every year some foreigners turn up.

The camp is sited in the hills near Valašské Klobouky at a location named Bílé Potoky, which means White Flowers. There is a communal army-style sleeping tent, and a teepee with a hearth for evening gathering. If you manage to secure two square metres of flat ground on the grass or under the trees, you may be able to set up your own tent. Some smart people bring a hammock and canvas or tarpaulin. There is no electricity or tap water. All washing is done in a small mountain stream of calcareous water from nearby springs.

Local people are hired to cook in the “army kitchen”, a wood frame structure covered with tarpaulin (see photo, left). The food is excellent, being mostly vegetarian, and plenty of it. During mowing and haymaking the mobile catering



The “army kitchen”.



crew provides drinks, like chicory, water, fruit juice, tea and last but not least, the infamous home-distilled plum brandy ‘Slivovice’. The latter is offered as early as 6 o’ clock, accompanied by the wise words: “Better one in the morning, then all day none!”.

The camp has a programme of voluntary workshops, including lectures on raw food, shamanic drumming, relaxing meditation, and so on which provide a welcome pastime in case of rainy weather. We were invited to give a presentation about our scything activities in Belgium. Excursions are also part of the camp curriculum, for example to a nature restoration project in a 100-year old fir and beech forest, acquired by Kosenka’s land trust. There was also a visit from the representative of an Ecuadorean indigenous tribe.

Work Rhythm

The work rhythm depends on the weather forecasts. Camp leaders announce the planned work the day before and on a regular basis during the day. During good weather, mowing is done in the early morning starting before dawn, usually between 5 and 10 am, until the sun is well up and the grass dries and becomes tough and/or mowers get tired. After lunch, there is a short break; some peen their blades while others socialize or rest. In the afternoon and evening, the mowed vegetation is raked, tedded or gathered in.

Piles of dry hay are covered with tarpaulin. When it starts raining, drying grass is piled up quickly and covered with tarps, to be spread out again as soon as the sun comes out. Due to the changeable weather, this might be done up to three times with some of the hay. Hay is gathered with wooden rakes and hayforks, then pulled downhill with tarpaulins which serve as hay-packed hovercrafts. We had good fun running down the hill as fast as we could with someone on top of the hay-packed tarpaulin!

Some of the wetland vegetation, which is too wet for haymaking but can be used as fodder or for making compost by local farmers, is piled up on larger tarpaulins and dragged down by draft horses. Good hay is

loaded on an old army truck, trampled to compact it, and then driven to barns nearby. During prolonged bad weather there is woodcutting work in the forest, or gathering up vegetation from wetlands.

Mowing Equipment and Techniques

The traditional scythes used during the camp are characterized by a straight snath with a single lower upwards facing grip with a slight curve pointing outwards. Also commonly used was a two grip variation on the straight snath. These, often made of beech, are still commonly sold at local hardware stores for about €5. For haymaking a wooden three-tined fork and wooden rakes are used.

Most blades in use were made in former Yugoslavia and the USSR. As the steel is considered of inferior quality and less hardened, these blades wear out twice as quickly, but peen easily. The price is about half that of a Fux blade. Kosenka provides dozens of these scythes, hayforks and rakes, but the organizers encourage people to bring their own gear. One or two Czech guys had the Swiss two-grip curved snath and Fux blade (as was also the case for us three Belgians). A Czech who entered mowing competitions told us he used a single grip straight snath with a 100cm Fux blade. He clearly was very pleased with it and stated that Fux was the best available (had he ever heard of Falci, we wondered).

For peening, both bar peen and flat anvils are used, generally fixed in a big wooden log. Some also brought their homemade peening horse. Most of them had never seen our Rinaldi field peening anvil, which is driven into the ground, and is common in Belgium. Peening techniques, eg type and strength of hammer strokes, blade positioning and holding etc varied greatly. The camp had a “master peener”, who was in charge of the Kosenka blades, though mowers were free to try peening blades they used.

Mowing techniques also differed. The local “eastern European style” is quite energetic involving strong and fast strokes. This style has the advantage of speed, but requires a lot of power. The smoother “Tai-Chi style” was introduced at the Kosenka camp by Peter Vido some years ago. Kosenka’s founder/chairman, Miroslav



Janík, passionately promotes this style in mowing workshops. We also noted a curious combination, in which the blade is lifted quite high at the start and end of each stroke, 30–40cm above ground level. We speculate that this style may be particularly suitable for mowing steep slopes, I briefly swapped scythes with a local and we both agreed afterwards that the single grip straight snath put less strain on fingers, wrists and shoulders, had a better and stronger leverage, especially for dense or high vegetation, while the Swiss model was more manoeuvrable and ergonomic.

All work was done in a relaxed atmosphere and upbeat mood, people joking away, often spontaneously translating the most hilarious bits so we could join in. For us, the whole set-up of an integrated scythe camp of this magnitude and duration was quite impressive. Moreover, we improved our scything gaining additional knowledge and (technical) experience of mowing, haymaking, honing and peening.

Kosenka was an inspirational and motivational trip for us to lift our Belgian scything activities to a higher



level. Two months after the trip, our local scything crew “Zeisteam” organized its first scything weekend, restoring fen-meadows and rare *Molinietum*-grassland. 21 volunteers attended, 11 of them mowers. Onward!

The Kosení camp is free of charge for participants who help out. For more information contact: kosenka@kosenka.cz

EDITOR’S NOTE: Everything we have heard about the events listed on pages 7-13 sounds great and we advise readers to make the effort to get there – but we do not recommend that you fly there. All these events can be reached by bus, train or boat (and it is easier to carry scythes on these modes of transport). Below is a picture of the grim reaper and his missus on a Climate Change demonstration last September.



Scything at Ryghsetra, Norway

by Neil Diment

"People come from all over Europe to Ryghsetra. It's an international meeting point for anyone interested in traditional methods of haymaking," explained Hans-Petter Evensen, a retired agricultural college lecturer, leaning on his hay rake taking a well-earned rest from his labours.

The 'slåttekurs' or scything course has been running for 21 years now, always from Thursday afternoon to Sunday on the second weekend in July, at Ryghsetra in Buskerud County, Norway just 40 miles or so south west of Oslo. Hans-Petter has been going for about 15 years, and was just one of around 70 people from 12 different countries on last year's course.

Ryghsetra is a small farm with one particularly stunning gem - a wonderful, botanically rich 7 acre (3ha) meadow. It is surrounded by forest on three sides and borders a small lake on the fourth - perfect for a cool dip at the end of a long day's scything! The course is organised annually by Per Klunderud, County Secretary for the Norwegian equivalent of a UK county wildlife trust, 'Naturvernforbundet' in Buskerud County. Accommodation is provided in a well-equipped centre right next door to the farm. There are usually between 30-35 participants on the course, and in addition there are about 30 helpers (including children and teenagers) who make up the kitchen team providing all the meals.

You don't know what you've lost till it's gone

During the course the meadow is mown with scythes, and the grass is stacked for drying on specially-built wood and wire hay-drying racks (in Norwegian:



'hesjing'). Per's daughter Tuva, now 21, has been coming with her three sisters all her life. She was given a small rake when she was 6 and three years ago she learned to put up the hay drying racks, traditionally a job just for the men. Everyone else in the hesjing team is in their 60s, or fast approaching, so if the tradition is to continue in the future the skills need to be passed on to a younger generation. "I don't want the meadow to disappear," she said (in perfect English). "It is so beautiful."

It's true. Without any kind of management the meadow would, within a few short years, soon scrub over and revert to forest. As in the UK almost all such meadows have been lost as farming methods have changed. With shallow soil making it difficult for ploughing and being on a bit of a slope, Ryghsetra's meadow had been mowed and managed in the traditional way, with no input of artificial fertilisers, until the 1980s when the old owner died. Though it stayed in the family there was much concern that it too could be lost but by then local

botanists had become aware of the meadow and its importance. With the agreement of the new owners, a mowing group was set up to "... let people pay to come here and work. It has since become one of the most intensely studied meadows in Norway," naturalist Arne Fjellberg told me as he lead a wildlife walk (in English) for participants around the meadow on the first morning of the course before the mowing had begun in earnest. "We have recorded over 180 species of plants here and several hundred species of invertebrates, including nearly half of all 35 species of bumblebee found in Norway."



Three sisters and a donkey loading the hayracks.



The finished hayricks

Why not go?

You can't help but absorb a lot about the history and culture of the old Norwegian farming landscape. It is no surprise that the course has become a national and international meeting place for people interested in such 'High Nature Value' (HNV) grasslands. One of the great things about just being there is that there are plenty of opportunities to talk to experts like Arne and others from all over Europe who have practical experience in management of ecologically-important farming landscapes - and often very different scything techniques!

Lennart Johnsson teaches the beginners scything and soon has everyone mowing in a diagonal line from the top of the meadow towards the lake. He is from Sweden and he too has been coming for the past 15 years since he was 20. These days he combines his 'day job' of tending the local cemetery in his home town with running scything courses. He has set up a small company - the first of its kind in the country - offering a mowing service for nature reserves on a contract basis. He will offer to loan you a scythe on the course to save you the battles with UK airlines if you try to take one on a plane, although apparently previous participants have had no problem 'smuggling' them into the country in a ski bag!

'Hay for horses'

There are new owners at Ryghsetra now, Aud and Gunnar Bakken. They share the long term conservation aims for the meadow. "We wouldn't have been allowed to buy the place if not," said Aud. There were special restrictions placed on its sale but she is bringing new ideas too to help support its continuing survival. After two weeks, when the hay has dried on the hesjes, they bag it up to sell to a local pet shop - who sell it on at a much higher mark up as 'premium quality' hay for horses! Aud and Gunnar now host the open day on the last afternoon of the course

which offers lots of delicious traditional food and music. "We love it here. We are in the centre of nowhere, but nearly every day someone passes by or comes to visit."

No wonder; our conversation was interrupted as a pair of young honey buzzards flew over. "We want to encourage more school classes to come to study the meadow and maybe run other courses ourselves," Aud continued as they disappeared from view. "The local community is proud of the place."

Getting there

This year the 22nd 'Slåttekurset på Ryghsetra' runs from 9th - 12th July. Getting

there is a cinch.

There are hourly trains from Oslo central station passing Mjøndalen the nearest stop for Ryghsetra; the same line also serves the main Oslo Gardermoen airport. You can be there in under two hours. The course organisers will happily make arrangements to pick you up from the railway station, if contacted in advance.

The full course fee for 2015 is £240, which includes all tuition, accommodation and meals, etc. There are cheaper rates for accompanying adults and children in the family as well as for students and youths. For those coming to the course from abroad, reduced fees are available to take account of the potentially high travel costs of getting to Norway. Please contact the organiser for more details:

Per Øystein Klunderud, County Secretary, Naturvernforbundet i Buskerud, Åssideveien, 3322 Fiskum, Norway
tel: ++ 47 / 32 75 05 04 mob: ++ 47 948 86 503
email: pedrokl@online.no

Neil Diment is former Hay Time Community Officer with the North Pennines AONB.



Label from the premium quality hay sold in pet shops. "Med Hjertergrass means with "heartgrass", ie quaking grass."

Haymaking in Transylvania

by Alex Hill

When I signed up for the Transylvanian Hay Festival I had great expectations but was not really sure what to expect. There was useful information on the organisers' website but it turned out that this did not do justice to the event. This had the advantage of providing the excitement of discovery of an experience that proved to be rewarding beyond all expectation.

The term Festival is a bit of a misnomer, as there are no more than about 20 visitors to the event and it is very intimate. The locals prefer to refer to it as a camp. The camp is held in the village of Áldomás, off the remote Gyimes Valley in the south eastern arm of the Carpathian Mountains. This is the historic eastern frontier of Hungary and the Csángo people who live here established their farms in the eighteenth century – they remain passionately Hungarian to this day. The folded flanks of the valleys are covered by extensive hay meadows, pasture and forest, with a succession of villages and hamlets extending up smaller valleys into the mountains. The lower mountain ridges are covered by huge meadows and the higher parts with summer grazing pastures.

This is a landscape that has seen little damage from the intrusions of modern, intensive agriculture and the chemicals and hardware that go with it. In Gyimes there are more than 450 recorded flowering plant species, including over 30 orchids. There are 120 butterfly species, about double the total for the whole of Britain. This is a landscape of outstanding international importance. The incredible diversity is sustained by traditional farming practices, principally haymaking and grazing. Farms are very small, with on average only two cows per farm. Hay wagons are hauled by horses or cows. Work is largely manual. This is a haystack economy, with many commodities measured in stacks and a very clear idea of how many stacks will be required to see the livestock through the long, harsh winters, with temperatures dipping to minus 30 degrees.

To survive in this landscape requires not only very hard work, but great resourcefulness and skill. Knowledge is passed down through the generations and people have an exceptional understanding of the environment in which they work. There is so much here that has been lost in Western Europe.



The system works because there is still a functional community, where families cooperate, horses are shared, people join together to mow and there is little reliance on outside help. These people have survived with their culture intact over centuries, under a succession of shifting, often hostile political regimes. This has bred resilience and a very clear sense of identity.

The hay camp is run by a farming couple, Attila and Reka Sárig, working with a local organisation that promotes sustainable development in the region – Pogányhavas Association (<http://www.treasuresoftransylvania.org>). Accommodation is in local homes and our food was prepared by Reka – delicious local dishes, almost exclusively homemade from their own organically grown produce. The cheese and other dairy products were superb, as one might expect from cows fed such a varied diet. Attila's cows never see the vet – he commented that he has more than 45 medicinal herbs on his farm and both his father and the cows themselves know what the cows need.

The day started at six o'clock or earlier. By noon the temperature nudged 30 degrees, so it was important to get going early. Breakfast at nine was a huge picnic of bread, cheese, sausage and vegetables, washed down with

a little pálinka, the homemade brandy from plums or pears. These people are devout Roman Catholics and certainly not puritans. More mowing followed until an early afternoon lunch and a siesta in the shade of a tree. We carried on into the early evening before tramping home.



The Windrow 9

The first two days we worked in meadows within walking distance of the village at an elevation of about 800 metres. An English botanist in the group remarked that in Britain conservation groups think they are doing well if they can maintain 20% non-grass species in meadows – here there was barely 20% grass. Our hosts were on hand to explain the virtues or otherwise of the wide variety of plants we were mowing. Owing to the relatively sparse sward, the sunshine and the high temperature, we were able to mow in the morning, turn, rake and build haystacks by evening. The stacks are built on cut tree branches so that they can be hauled by horse to a place accessible by cart.

The hay meadows are under threat from neglect, as young people are enticed away by the prospect of consumer riches and there is a shortage of labour. If not mown, the meadows very quickly revert to scrub and then forest. In the absence of labour there is a considerable amount of mowing with finger-bar motor mowers but this is not as good for the meadows as mowing by



scythe. The motor mowers do not cut as close, missing many of the low, broad leaf plants that the cows prefer. There are also meadows that are much too steep for motor mowing and the numerous ant hills pose an obstacle.

Tools were provided by our hosts. The scythes had Slovakian blades and snaths made by local craftsmen, with either one grip or two, depending on family and individual preference. The rakes were made by Attila's uncle Viktor and were beautifully light and a delight to work with. Our group included those with a little mowing experience and some with none. Under the expert guidance of Attila and his colleagues we very quickly acquired a basic level of skill and were delighted to see how much our team could achieve. We improved day by day. Experts were on hand to peen our blades, as necessary.



February 2015

The hard work was interspersed with walks to the low summer pastures to see cheese-making, a visit to uncle Viktor to learn about making rakes, talks from local naturalists, folk-dancing, music and much more.

The latter half of the week was spent in the high meadows at about 1300 metres. We slept on hay in a traditional wooden barn, drank water from the spring and enjoyed hearty feasts cooked in a large cauldron. Nightjars swooped overhead as we sat around the fire. This was dream mowing, with breath-taking views to far mountain peaks and down into the distant valleys below. By now we were gaining confidence and mowed several acres of hay, some of which we stacked and some that we rolled into the barn.

Owing to the lack of tractors, poor or non-existent roads and the remoteness of these mountain meadows, the hay is stored in barns until the winter snows, whereupon it is hauled to the farms by horse-drawn sledge, nearly a ton a load. This requires heroic effort and skill on the part of the horse and a strong nerve on the part of the men.

The hay festival offers so much: a chance to mow exquisite meadows in beautiful surroundings, work with enthusiastic locals and visitors and to gain a glimpse of a culture and sense of community that is a distant memory in most of Europe. In a small but important way, our involvement helps to preserve these meadows and makes a contribution to the local economy. The meadows are under threat from neglect and from either inappropriate or insufficient support from the EU. Pogány-havas Association has a broad programme of activities to understand and support nature friendly farming and biodiversity, including scientific research, writing grant applications for farmers, hay tourism, lobbying, monitoring, projects etc. The hay camp is part of the support for these activities. The participants came away inspired by the warmth and hospitality of our hosts and their dedication to preserving this magnificent landscape.

The next Transylvanian hay camp is 9-16 August 2015 <http://www.treasuresoftransylvania.org/haymeadow-biodiversity/hay-making-festival>

For more information contact Barbara Knowles barbara.knowles@yahoo.co.uk

