

The Windrow

Newsletter of The Scythe Association of Britain and Ireland

No 11 March 2016



Association Jethro

Scythes in the Tropics – See P.11

CONTENTS OF THIS ISSUE

SABI news	page 2	Miscellany:	7
Courses at Festivals	2	Meadows in the Wye Valley, Martin Kibblewhite,	
New Equipment	2	Fussell's, Brockwell Bake, Welsh Nomenclature	
UK Events	3	Manufacturing Whetstones	8
International Events	4	Marshall Roberts explains how he did it.	
UK Training Courses	5	Stadtschnitters Urban mowers.	10
Haymaking in the Pyrenees 1950	6	The Scythe Revolution, N and S.	11
Heinzen und Pupen (Hayrack video)	6	Introducing scythes into tropical countries	
		Scythe Mission to Machete Land	14

SABI NEWS



International Peening Day

International Peening Day this year falls on 3rd April. An 'everywhere-event' — except for people in the Southern Hemisphere — its aims are to remind people to prepare their scythes in advance of the mowing season and provide support by encouraging them to meet and peen together.

For those of us who are constantly behind with everything, April 3 is a bit too early — but Richard Brown is not one of these. He writes:

I will be at home in my Norfolk workshop (pictured above) on 3 April peening if anyone would like to join me to sort their blades. I will have grass to test blades on (and the sharp-o-meter.) I may also do some steam bending of snaths if anyone is interested - peen and steam.

Richard's workshop is at PE34 4PL, and you can contact him at richardjbrown556@gmail.com

EQUIPMENT

Stones

Simon Fairlie writes: There are no more Bregenzer stones, which were the left over stock from a quarry that closed down. I am now selling Mailander stones which are heavier and better quality, but more than twice the price of the Bregenzer. I also have on trial some French stones from the Pyrenees, including a batch of 100 fairly cheap ones, which are, however, very thin. We are looking at other sources of stones, and waiting for someone to revive the UK whetstone industry (see article p 8).

Volunteering

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.

Mini Apprenticeship - Dorset

There are still one or two opportunities 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 scythes@myphone.coop

COURSES AT FESTIVALS

Why struggle?

Learn how to get your blades sharp and to scythe expertly at the
IMPROVERS' MASTERCLASS

at the

West Country Scythe Festival

Friday 10 - Saturday 11 June

for

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

You will get personal attention from three of the most experienced teachers in the UK:

Christiane Laganda, scythe and yoga teacher from Austria;

Phil Batten master peener and scythe competition winner from Scythe Cymru,

and **Steve Tomlin** author of the definitive scythe manual *Learn to Scythe*.

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

The cost is £120 for individuals, £140 for organizations, £80 concession for unwaged. Meals are provided. Camping on site is available. Includes live Gypsy Jazz on Saturday evening.

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

Training at the Eastern Counties Scythe Festival

On the first day of the Scything festival - Saturday 25 June 2016. 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/>

Beginners Courses at Community Haystacks Walthamstow Marshes

Saturday 30 and Sunday 31st July 2016

See page 3

Training at the Scythe and Cider Festival Wakehurst Place Sussex

2nd/3rd July

See page 3

SMALL GRAIN CULTIVATION AND PROCESSING

A practical information sharing event
with John Letts
at Monkton Wyld Court

12-13 October

Contact Simon chapter7@tllo.org.uk

The Twelfth West Country Scythe Festival

and
Green Fair

SUNDAY
12 JUNE 2016

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

SCYTHE CHAMPIONSHIP

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

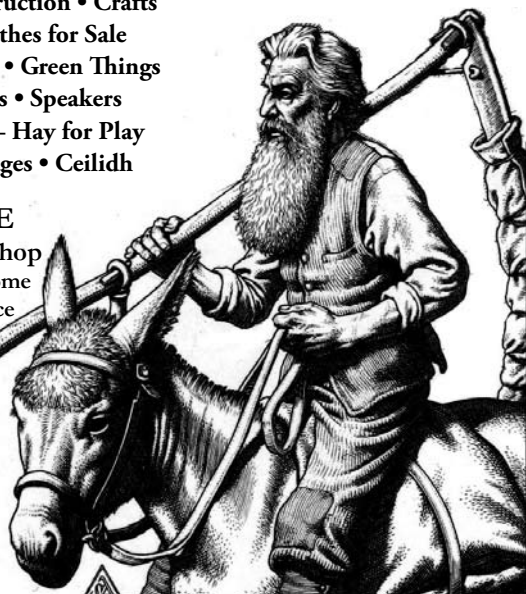
ENTRY £10 Per Car
£2 for Cyclists, Walkers and
Equestrians — KIDS FREE

10-11 JUNE

Scything Workshop

For people with some
scything experience
who want to learn
to mow expertly
and get their
blade impeccably
sharp.

**Parking and
Camping on
Site**



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

UK National Meadows Day, Hereford

2nd July 2016

Hereford Wildlife Trust (HWT) Birches Farm Nature Reserve,
near Kington, Herefordshire. A meadow celebrations day, run
in partnership by Gardens in the Wild & HWT, with a range of
guided walks, talks & refreshments all in aid of restoration of
Birches Farm. Scythe courses and English scythe demonstrations.

for details please contact Stas Calder at HWT: a.calder@herefordshirewt.

Eighth Eastern Counties Scythe Festival

Eighth Eastern Counties Scythe Festival

Wimpole, Herts 25-26 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, greenwood work-
ing and other rural crafts. Camping is available and there are spaces
for stallholders (free if you demonstrate, otherwise 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 meet on Tuesday
evenings.

For more information contact Jim McVittie (dalefield@ntlworld.com).

Wimpole Scything Course

On the first day of the Scything festival - Saturday 25 June 2016.

Cost is £60 per person. The course is 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/>



Community Haystacks Walthamstow Marshes

Saturday 30 and Sunday 31st July 2016

The Community Haystacks weekend, pictured above,
is London's scythe festival. It has a mixed programme
of scything workshops, talks, guided walks, a scything
competition, bring-your-own-picnic and haystack making.

Info will be on the website in June: www.h-a-y-s-t-a-c-k-s.net

Scythe and Cider Festival Wakehurst Place Sussex

2nd/3rd July.

A family day out, with events for scythe enthusiasts.
There is a particular emphasis on getting newcomers
involved, with training on both Saturday and Sunday. There
are light-hearted competitions on both days (including an
award for the best novice team) with the main aim of hav-
ing fun. The SABI events page (<http://scytheassociation.org/events/>) entry includes a link to images of the 2015
event. Wakehurst Place is at Ardingly near Haywards Heath
RH17 6TN.

Mow Ling's Meadow Diss, Norfolk

Friday 16th - Sunday 18th Sept

As part of the aim of improving the diversity of grasses
and flowers in our 4 acre camping meadow, you are invit-
ed to help mow as much as we can with scythes. Camping
accommodation, beer, pizza etc provided.

Please contact Kath Shearer on 01359 250594 or at info@lingsmeadow.co.uk.



Three different kinds of snath used here by five
participants of the "big mow" at the Wimpole Festival
in 2015, involving some 50 participants.

International Events

Romania

International Haymaking Camp 7 to 14 August 2016 in Gyimes, Transylvania

Make friends, have fun, learn new skills and help to preserve valuable mountain hay meadows and their plant, wildlife and traditions in one of the last large-scale medieval landscapes of Europe: the eastern Carpathians of Romania.

This is a great opportunity for nature lovers and those interested in traditional culture and sustainable living to learn about the connections between nature and farming by doing physical work alongside local people and participating in the art and science of hay making and related skills.

See article in Windrow 9.

Registration is now open at <http://www.treasuresoftransylvania.org/haymeadow-biodiversity/hay-making-festival>

Conference: Management of Extensive Grasslands in Mountain Areas

Conference in Lunca de Jos, Valea lui Boros (Transylvania, Romania) 29-31 May 2016. How to preserve species-rich grassland and traditional farming systems. For scientists, farmers, conservationists and policymakers.

Registration is now open at <http://poganyhavas.hu/menu.php?menu=projektek&lang=en>



Transylvanian Trip

Four prominent members of SABI went to Transylvania last summer to discover the magnificent wildflower meadows (above), learn the rough but effective Romanian method of peening rough but effective Russian blades (below), and work off a diet of farmhouse cheese, fatty bacon and *palinka*, the local brandy, (not pictured).

For more of their exploits see <http://scytheassociation.org/news/>



Czech Republic:

Annual Kosení Mowing and Haymaking Camp,

In the White Carpathian region near the Slovak Border. The Kosení camp is free of charge for participants who help out. From 2 July to 8 July and from 9 July to 16 July. See article in Windrow 9.

For more information contact: kosenka@kosenka.cz

Ireland :

Trim Haymaking Festival and Scythe Competition

Trim, Co Meath Ireland Entrance at the Porchfield 12:PM On Sun 21st June 2015 Admission €10.

<http://trimhaymakingfestival.com>

Norway

Ryghsetra Scythe Course

Thursday 7 July to Sunday 10 July 2016, at Ryghsetra in Buskerud County, Norway just 40 miles or so south west of Oslo. See article in Windrow 9.

Contact: 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

English language invitation at <http://naturvernforbundet.no/buskerud/>

Germany

Scythe Championship

17 -19 June in Saxony, Germany
alfred.meyer11@ewetel.net

Uncle Viktor

Steve Tomlin pays tribute to a man who made rakes from hand-carved wooden rivets

I received some sad news from Transylvania in February that Victor-basci (Uncle Viktor), the rake and scythe snath maker for the area around Gyimes, has died.

I visited the area in 2011 to take part in the Haymaking Festival organised by Attila Sárig and the Pogány-havas Microregional Association to promote the region and it's wonderful landscape, traditions and biodiversity.

During the week of scything and hay making, the visit to Viktor-basci was a real highlight. Despite the language barrier, he entertained and informed and clearly enjoyed having visitors come and see how he worked. As the festival has gained attention, more people from the UK scythe scene have taken part and there are now rakes and scythes made by Viktor-basci around the country.

Each rake has 19 tines, all laboriously shaped by hand first into a long square taper and then a shouldered tenon is handcarved onto one end and the other end rounded with a knife. I sat with him in his small workshop and carved a few tines with him. The wood is all dried before assembly so the tenon is simply made to a push fit into the head – the shoulder stops it pushing further through and on top of the head Viktor-basci leaves 2mm of tenon protruding which he peens over like a rivet head to prevent the tine falling out. We were shown how the split stail is fitted to the head and his method for getting the head straight and balanced. A lovely little touch are two bands of unstripped bark left on the stail just below the split as decoration.

You can watch Uncle Viktor making a rake on a you tube video filmed in 2015 by Jennie Hall, entitled Viktor the Toolmaker: www.youtube.com/watch?v=gO24yYSRX4



TRAINING COURSES

The teachers marked with an asterisk usually have scythes for sale. For an English scythe courses see Mark Allery and Martin Kibblewhite. For grassland management see Richard Brown. For two day courses including grassland management and haymaking see Simon Fairlie.

SCOTLAND

Steve Tomlin*

Steve has taught several courses in Scotland, as far north as Caithness. Email to book a group workshop at your own venue and Steve will travel to you which is much more economical.

Steve Tomlin*, Cumbria, England
stevetomlin8@gmail.com Steve-TomlinCrafts.wordpress.com

IRELAND

Chris Hayes - Wexford*

Sunday May 8th- Introduction to Scything at BadgersHill, Bolgerstown, Barntown, Wexford

Sunday July 17th- Mowing Day at BadgersHill, Bolgerstown, Barntown; chris@badgershillforestry.ie ph- 087 1226266

WALES

Andrea Gilpin - Powys

Learn to scythe Wild Meadow, Presteigne, Powys

Saturday 21st of May:

Sunday 5th June
other dates in July and August to be confirmed - £50. Courses offered further afield.

www.wildmeadow.co ; hello@wildmeadow.co 01544 267039

Philip Batten - S Wales*

Dyfed Permaculture Farm Trust, Carmarthenshire.

Introductory Scythe Courses - Saturday 28th May, Tuesday 28th June, Wednesday 27th July, Saturday 6th August, Sunday 21st August- £60 / £50 (low wage concession).

Peening and Sharpening Workshops - Sunday 3rd April, Saturday 9th July, Sunday 18th September - £40

Tai Chi Mowing - afternoon Saturday 9th July until afternoon Sunday 10th July- £80-£100, book this course with the peening workshop on 9th July and receive a 10% discount.

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

NORTH ENGLAND

Steve Tomlin* - Cumbria

Learn to Scythe courses on Friday 27th May (FULL) & Saturday 16th July at Brigflatts, near Sedbergh, Cumbria £80 I am also available to teach groups and 1-to-1 courses at your own venue nationwide.

More info at <https://stevetomlin-crafts.wordpress.com/learn-to-scythe/> email stevetomlin8@gmail.com

MIDLANDS

Clive Leeke, Warks*

Beginners Scything, 25 June 2016; Capability Brown Celebration free taster sessions at Compton Verney, Warwickshire CV35 9HZ

For booking information email Tamsin Moss tamsin.mosse@comptonverney.org.uk or phone: 01926 645563. Contact Clive at clive@austrianscythes.co.uk www.austrianscythes.co.uk/

Jez Hastings, Staffs*

Wood Lane, 3 miles south of Alsager rail station.

Sunday 22 May, Sunday 31 July 1/2 and full day courses.

See website for dates/more details: www.singlemaltjacket.co.uk

Martin Kibblewhite and David Kuegler, Herefordshire

2 short beginners courses, plus demonstration of the English scythe, finishing the day with a team mowing display by anyone who wishes to take part. Hereford Wildlife Trust (HWT) Birches Farm Nature Reserve, near Kington, Herefordshire.

Booking is essential for the scything course - contact Stas Calder at HWT: a.calder@herfordshirewt.co.uk

WEST OF ENGLAND

Andi Rickard* - Somerset/Devon

(Reigning Ladies Champion)

Learn to Mow with an Austrian Scythe

16th April, Swains Lane Nature Reserve, Wellington. £65

May 14th and July 23rd Blackdown Hills Natural Futures Group, venues TBC.

4th June, Somerset Smallholders, Cossington, Somerset.

2nd July, National Trust, Knightshayes

4th and 12th August, RHS Rosemoor.

Dates TBC, Blackdown Hills Natural Futures Group, 2 courses

Andi is also available to teach groups and individuals at your location in Somerset or neighbouring counties. Peening improvement workshops. Scythes for sale.

Email andirickard@me.com or call 0758 1239453

For the Improvers course at the West Country Scythe Fair, and the Beginners course at the Eastern Counties Festival, see page 2.

Kevin Austin* Cornwall

Skyegrove, Herodsfoot, Cornwall. Beginners scything course: 28th May and 6th Aug 2016 - £65

Improvers scything course: 10th September - £65

Alternatively, if you prefer, we can come to your land to deliver the course for a group of students (6 max) the cost is £200
www.skyegrove.co.uk
kevin@skyegrove.co.uk

Simon Fairlie - Dorset/Devon*

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

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

20-22 May
16-17 July
17-18 September

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

Chris Riley - N Dorset*

Available for scythe training in the Wessex area.

Beginners Courses:

Assington Mill, near Sudbury, Suffolk; Sun. 22nd May 2016. For info and to book, go to www.assingtonmill.com FULL

For info and to book on the following 3 courses go to www.cotswoldsruralskills.org.uk

Northleach, North Glos; Wed. 1st June 2016

Dyrham Park, South Glos; Sat. 2nd July 2016

Friary, near Bath; Wed. 17th August 2016

The following beginner's course is only for those involved in managing burial grounds: St Mary's Church, Stalbridge, North Dorset; Tue. 24th May 2016. Go to www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk

chris@pratensis.net 07719 691312; www.pratensis.net

EAST ANGLIA

Richard Brown - Norfolk*

Botanist, ecologist and seedsmen offers scythe courses and tuition by arrangement.

Practical scything & grassland management. Thursday 23 June 2016, Kings Lynn. A 'flora locale' course aimed at land managers and other practitioners involved in the design, management and restoration of wild plants and habitats for biodiversity. Fee £100 / £75 concessions to book this course book go to floraloale.org

Richard Brown*, Kings Lynn, Norfolk. richardjbrown556@gmail.com

See also course at the Wimpole Festival, page 2.

SOUTH EAST

Clive Leeke - Berks, Herts and London*

Beginners Scything 16 July 2016; Free taster sessions at Peacock Meadows, Bracknell Forest

For booking information email Daniel.Carpenter@bracknell-forest.gov.uk or phone: 01344 354125

Contact Clive at clive@austrianscythes.co.uk www.austrianscythes.co.uk/

Beth Tilston - Sussex*

Beginners Scything Course at Barcombe, East Sussex: Saturday 28 May 2016 Saturday 18th June 2016 Saturday 23rd July 2016

Improvers Scything Course at Barcombe, East Sussex:

Saturday 13th August 2016

www.learnscything.com/courses/

Simon Fairlie Brighton*

Two day course with tutors: Simon Fairlie, Stefan Gehrels 20-21 August, Cost: £80-£200 (depending on income)

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

Mark Allery*, W Sussex/Surrey

Mark is a leading authority on English Scythes, but also teaches and sells continental scythes.

He has five courses arranged for 2016.

Contact marknallery@gmail.com or on 01428 641708 or via <http://woodlandantics.wordpress.com>

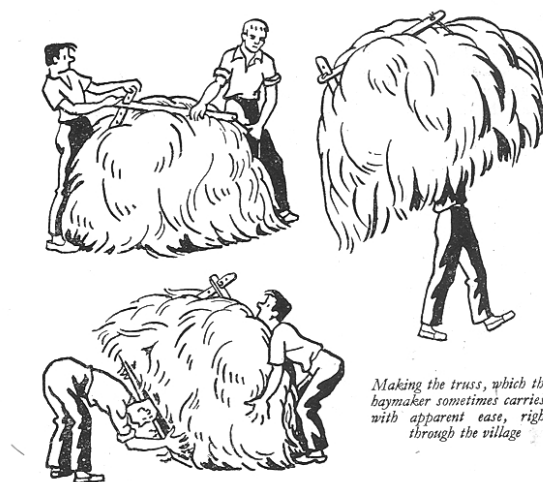
Haymaking in the Pyrenees

A short account from the 1950s of French catchwork water-meadows, by Marjorie Wise.

Luz St Sauveur is a small commune twenty miles south of Lourdes. It lies high in the mountains which enclose it on the east, west and south. You can wander from village to village by tracks and field paths, meeting only haymakers, or old women riding on mules loaded with the week's groceries, hay, manure, harrows or sacks of grain going to the mill. Where a village has a road however there is generally a concrete garage with a sliding door, and hydro-electric plants, which are everywhere, have brought light and power to cottages and cow barns. Streams have been diverted to communal washing places and for cooling the little stone larders in the gardens, but not for houses, so that many of the women have to walk far for their water.

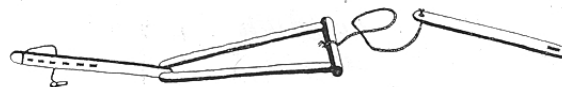
Most of the men seem to be smallholders, each owning his strips of land here and there over the valley and up the mountain. Many have their own pigs and poultry at home, and all kinds of beehive from decrepit boxes to large modern hives. They have also their own little orchards and well-stocked gardens.

When we arrived at the end of August the scent of hay was everywhere. The uncut meadows were still being irrigated. The mountain sides are a network of tiny channels, well kept and cunningly devised, so that a slate placed across a channel will direct the strong swift flow of water over any part of a meadow in need of it.



271

The grass is cut with scythes in plots varying from 30 to 100 yards square, and left in neat bands, generally part of concentric circles, but sometimes in beautiful curves following the line of the field. It is turned two or three times on the day after cutting and is picked up the same evening or the following day.



You meet what are apparently walking haystacks, only to find that there is a man underneath each enormous truss. This is formed with the aid of the wooden device shown in the illustration. It is shaped like a narrow isosceles triangle; at the apex there is a bar with a row of holes and a peg; and at the base a rope tied to a stick with a slot into which the bar fits. The whole contrivance is laid on the ground and the hay loaded onto it. Then the rope is thrown over the top, and two men pull and tug until the bar appears through the slot in the stick and a peg can be inserted in one of the holes. The loose hay is raked from the edges until the truss is neat and firm. Then the carrier bends over until his head almost reaches his feet and rams his head into the triangle. Other haymakers lift the bundle as he straightens himself and he walks with apparent ease, sometimes up a flight of steps to a barn, sometimes right through the village, sometimes only to a waiting lorry, wagon or mule.

Haymaking continues well into the middle of October in the high meadows. There are usually three crops in the valleys, the last being sometimes small, but higher up there are only two.

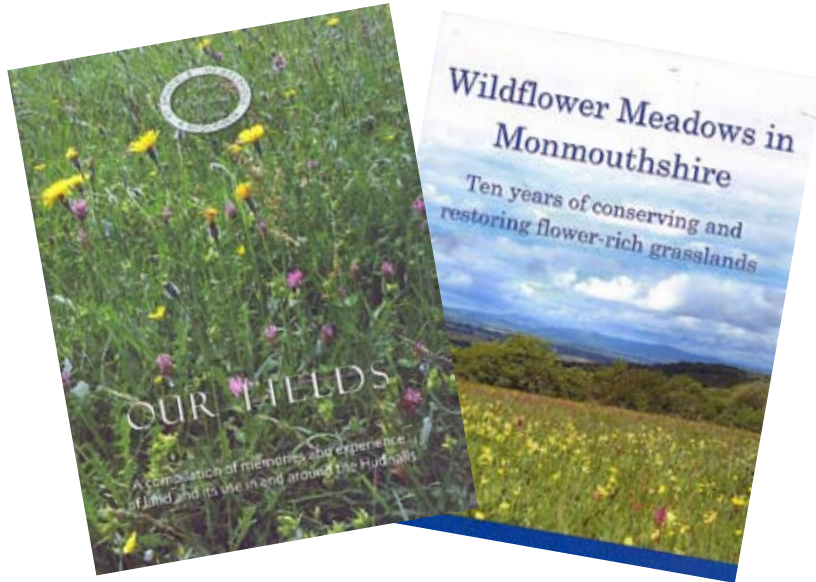
Taken from "Harvest in the High Pyrenees" by Marjorie Wise, in *The Countryman*, Vol XLIV, no 2 Winter 1951.



Heinzen und Puppen . . .

means *Hay Racks and Stooks* in German, and is the title of an 11 minute film made in Germany in 1942, presumably for the war effort, demonstrating several different ways of racking hay and stooking crops. These include the classic tetrapod, the single stem Tirolean cross-tree, wire fences, a post and rail system and a particularly ingenious light-weight folding rack known as the "Scherzinge Heinzen". The racks are all loaded with teutonic efficiency by well-muscled and well-groomed young *arbeiter*, and considerable attention is given to the speed with which the racks can be unloaded of their hay. The film also depicts a number of systems for stooking crops. It ends with a magnificent panorama of a wide arable plain criss-crossed with row after row of hay racks. If any German speaker cares to translate the exquisitely enunciated commentary, we would gladly publish relevant passages from it in the next issue of *The Windrow*.

You can find it at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CSwmfZQyT4I&feature=youtu.be> or google "Landwirtschaft Gestern Heinzen und Puppen"



Local Meadow Listings

Anyone interested in promoting awareness and management of meadows in their locality should look at these two publications. *Our Fields* tells the stories of residents of Hewelsfield and St Briavels parishes in the Wye Valley who have been restoring or maintaining wildflower meadows on their land. There are 17 case studies in all, most of them two pages long and all lavishly illustrated. The booklet is produced by the Parish Grasslands Project which was started in 2001, by, amongst others, George Peterken, author of the book *Meadows* (reviewed in Windrow xxx and available for www.thescytheshop.co.uk) *Wildlife Meadows in Monmouthshire* does a similar job for members of Monmouthshire Meadows Group, on the opposite bank of the River Wye.

Both groups have acquired haymaking and similar machinery that can be hired by members – with mixed success. On only one of the case studies – Oakwood in St Briavels – do the owners appear to be using a scythe. However the Parish Grasslands Project has commissioned a scythe course with Andrea Gilpin this year, so hopefully some members of the group will acquire sufficient skill to find out how useful the scythe can be for smaller meadows

Our Fields is available from Sally Secrett, Greystones House, Hewelsfield, Glos, GL 6UZ; sally.secrett@tiscali.co.uk. £6.00 including p&p.



Martin Kibblewhite's Video

This photo comes from a 17 minute video entitled *Martin Kibblewhite and the English Scythe*. Martin, who has several times won the "bus pass" award at the West Country Scythe Fair, gives much needed advice on sharpening and using the traditional British scythe.

You can find the video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2txi_zFwQ_w



Brockwell Bake

The red speck driving this swathe through the corn is Illinois Radu, from Romania, helping to reap Brockwell Bakes' 2015 wheat harvest. After the customary difficulties adjusting cradles and technique, the team managed to harvest the field with two scythes going at a time, keeping three sheaf binders (using Gaffa tape?) and stookers busy. Nice weather for once.

For a history of Brockwell Bake's adventures growing and harvesting wheat, see <http://brockwell-bake.org.uk/index.php>



Fussells Ironworks

Near the village of Mells in Somerset, lie the remains of an ironworks that manufactured scythes, as well as billhooks, reaping hooks and spades. Fussell's scythes were a respected brand used all over the world, until they became bankrupt in 1894. At its peak there were around 250 people working at the main Lower Works, which used the energy of the Mells River tumbling down from the Mendips to power its forges.

Today the atmospheric ruins of the buildings can be interpreted with the aid of contemporary plans. The photo on the left shows three arched bays where trip hammers forged scythes, with a curved depression visible in the back wall to accommodate a large water-wheel. The other image is of the remains of the "twisting passage" where straw rope was made for packing scythe blades.

Currently the site is largely closed off for safety reasons. I will pass on the information when access becomes possible.

Chris Riley

Mind Your Language

Phil and Michelle at Scythe Cymru, (aka *Pladur Wales*) have been researching haymaking terms in the Welsh dictionary, *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*, and come up with all sorts of gems, such as these:

gwaïr doldir — meadow hay

gwaïr wedi coch — hay which has been stacked while green and has deteriorated through fermentation (lit. reddened hay);

haffiad — a snatching, a snapping or grabbing; (clumsy) stroke with scythe, &c., a hacking;

bonllath — long stubble left after scyther or machine has cut carelessly;

ffocsaf — to make love in the hay during harvest;

The Welsh dictionary is at <http://www.geiriadur.ac.uk/> and more terms from it can be found at the Scythe Cymru site: <http://scythecymru.co.uk/2015/11/06/how-many-words-for-hay/http://scythecymru.co.uk/2015/11/06/how-many-words-for-hay/>

Manufacturing Whetstones

The race is on to manufacture and market a whetstone sourced in the UK. Marshall Roberts of Bladerunners explains how he has done it in Australia, and considers whether it is viable for a small-scale, small-volume scythe supplier.

For all whetstones, regardless of whether they are synthetic or natural, there are a number of factors that determine, together, how they perform:

- **Size of the particles that make up the stone.**

Sand, for example, by definition, refers to particles that fall within a size range of $1/16$ th of a mm to 2mm, so in theory sandstones at either end of this range can be comprised of particles that differ in size by a factor of 32.

- **Shape of the particles.** Stones made of particles of similar sizes can differ markedly in whether they behave like a coarse or a fine stone, because of the way the particles are shaped (smooth or sharp).

- **The configuration of the particles.** Again, stones made of particles of similar sizes can differ markedly in whether they behave like a coarse or a fine stone, because of the way the particles are 'clumped' or not clumped. Particles can be clumped due to some bond between them such that they behave like a larger particle or, as in natural metamorphic stones, they may be partially fused by pressure and/or heat (in which case it becomes a matter of distinction about whether the particle size has actually changed). Most natural whetstones are sedimentary rock, but not all.

- **Hardness of the particles.** A particle of diamond 1mm in size will continue to grind steel far longer than a particle of relatively soft sand of the same size. Sand can be comprised of a variety of particles, so one sandstone may have harder particles than another.

- **Strength of the substrate/bond between the particles, or between the clumps of particles.** A soft bond will result in fresh particles being exposed faster, so will likely result in a more aggressive cut. A bond that is overly soft will result in the entire stone breaking easily.

- **Consistency/regularity of the composition.** For example, a very nice, fine sandstone may be rendered far less useful if it's peppered with large chunks of quartz.

The interplay between these factors can be confounding. For example, a stone with relatively hard, large particles and a relatively hard bond is likely to give a very aggressive cut for some time, but having a harder bond, the particles may wear down and start to behave far less aggressively as the rough edges of the particles are worn off, while a stone with softer, smaller particles and a soft bond may continue to behave more aggressively than the first stone because fresh, sharp points are continually being applied to the steel. This is why I consider a stone's "grit" rating – which refers to the particle size alone – to be a rather unhelpful measure for natural stones (as opposed to synthetic stones, where all the factors can be controlled in manufacture, so that



You can find Marshall Roberts' musings about the scythe at www.scythemowers.net (frivolous) and www.scythes.com.au (serious).

it is possible to compare apples to apples). Perhaps a whetstone boffin could create something like a natural whetstone "cut rating" (to supersede "grit rating"), which would refer to the effect a stone has (which is what we're ultimately concerned with) on a standard grade of steel after a standard number of hours, to allow for particle and bond hardness, as well as the size and shape of the particle, to have a role in determining the end result.

In addition to the above factors, there are "wildcards" that can be added into the mix, as occurs in natural Coticule. This stone has garnets in it which will roll around in the slurry to smooth the steel more, which adds a very different kind of finish and also gives a wide variety of aggressiveness depending on whether the stone is used with a thick or thin slurry or none at all. For the purposes of scythe sharpening, though, a slurry is not likely to come into play since most field honing is done quickly.

Finding the Stone

So how does one go about choosing a suitable whetstone? My answer is that beyond just looking at it with a loupe and rubbing it with your thumb to see how 'toothy' and soft it feels, you can't, really – you really need to test it over time. Henk Bos gave a simple test which will at least tell you whether your stone has any hope of performing adequately, and that is to try it on the back of a stainless steel spoon – if it marks or polishes the spoon, it's worth pursuing.

It's also worth noting that I've yet to find a sedimentary rock that is completely useless for any honing purpose. Pretty much any sedimentary rock will do something to steel, it's just a question of what minimum level of effectiveness you are prepared to accept. Even metamorphic stones that can be polished up like marble will do something to steel, if the stone is not polished and left reasonably rough.

This discussion, though, is about financial viability, so the minimum level of effectiveness needs to be quite high. With this in mind, my main issue in stone selection was hardness of the bond; any stone that a customer will be happy to pay for needs to be reasonably hard (at least you would expect so – I personally am unimpressed with the durability of the Bregenzer, despite its cutting effectiveness) so that it won't break or get whittled away too quickly. The first whetstone I made (with an angle grinder and standard masonry cutting wheel) from sandstone sourced on the farm, was a brilliant performer as a coarse stone, except that the stone was removed faster than the steel from the blade, and it ended up simply breaking in half in my hand after some dozen or two dozen uses. This level of softness was typical for most sandstone I was able to find, even after seeking out several stonemasons locally and interstate.

The sandstone we eventually located is extremely hard – as can be seen in this picture, it's possible to mechanically slice off quite thin slivers of the stone without it breaking. While the longer-lasting stone makes it a more attractive proposition for buyers and therefore more likely to be financially viable (I'm assuming here that you're not interested selling stones with planned obsolescence to promote your own financial viability), it also creates a bigger financial burden on the manufacturer in terms of getting the stone cut; a standard masonry grinding wheel would be chewed away into nothing before making many cuts into hard sandstone, so it calls for specialised gear.

Finding the Kit

So, at this point we had a load of really hard sandstone and no means of cutting it effectively. I did cut a couple for ourselves to confirm that the sandstone would be effective as a whetstone, with an angle grinder and a diamond cutting wheel, but even this was terribly slow going and not at all safe. I contacted a number of stonemasons to enquire about having the stone 'roughed out' to the basic canoe



March 2016

shape, so I could finish them with a grinder. Some never replied, one agreed to do a proof of concept and never did, another wasn't really equipped to do the job, and another was fully equipped and quoted \$154 Australian per hour for their time (about £77 or \$73 US). I couldn't imagine any of our customers being willing to bear that cost.

The kind of block saws that I wanted to use to do the job safely – with a table that slides into the saw blade – had a starting retail price of around A\$1500, with the really good ones being in the range of A\$4000. Second-hand gear became interesting. Used hand-held concrete demolition saws were available on online auctions for A\$2004 – not ideal, but a big step up from an angle grinder. Used table-style block saws were available for around for A600-1200.

We ended up securing a used table-style block saw with a 400mm diamond blade, and another small tile saw, for just A\$100 from our University's Geology department, which was looking to upgrade its equipment. Brand-name blades themselves retail at \$300. It's an old saw, and the closest contemporary model I've been able to find online is a Husqvarna 400mm brick saw which retails at \$1800. Universities are great.

I was now able to rough out my canoe shapes safely and relatively quickly (but only relatively – when I'm cutting blocks the blade only cuts about 1mm per second), and I now needed some more effective grinding gear. I found some marble grinding cups in Klingspor's range, and these work very well – they seemed quite pricey at \$13 each wholesale, but I ordered six and I am still using the first one, having made thirty stones. A google search for "Klingspor supra c16r" will find these accessories.

On top of these expenses, there's electricity (which I haven't attempted to price yet) and safety gear such as a good quality particulate mask (silicosis is a very real risk when cutting or grinding stone), visor, earmuffs, and gloves.

Does It Pay?

We are able to sell these stones – at A\$40 (£20) each – faster than I'm able to make them with my available time. The raw material costs us nothing except A\$30 per annum for a prospecting licence and fuel and time to retrieve the sandstone from where it's hiding. Based on the last batch I produced, it takes about 16 minutes to rough out one whetstone (by cutting large blocks into whetstone-width slabs, then marking the slabs with canoe shapes and cutting outside the lines) and another 15 minutes to grind it into its final shape. There are "bad days" where it takes 4 hours to make two stones because the stones I first spent time cutting prove to be inap-



A Klingspor marble grinding cup (above) and a Husqvarna 400mm water-fed brick saw (right).



propriate for the application. But normally, about half an hour's time, electricity, consumables (diamond blade – eventually – and the grinding cups), wear and tear on A\$100 worth (or A\$1800 worth, depending on how you look at it) of machinery, and safety gear that I already owned – for A\$40.

In short, this item is about the only thing in our catalogue that we're really making any money on. If we were dealing with a large deposit of sandstone (as in, a rockface) it may be faster or slower than collecting manageable-sized rocks as we are currently – depending on how the rockface sheared. It's also quite likely we could be charging more – one scythe retailer has whetstones listed at US\$45, which is currently A\$62 or £31 at time of writing, and we have whetstone reviews with high praise from Peter and Ashley Vido.

And this, of course, is an important point – what the customer is willing to pay based on an item's perceived worth. I am trying to value-add: by creating a beautifully-shaped stone; one which is thicker in both widths than most other stones and so will last longer; one that has rounded honing edges to better match the curved blade, rather than dead-flat edges as in the Rozsutec, and; one which is much stronger than, say, the Bregenzer. Our customers also place value on the fact that we made it ourselves – they tell us so.

Presumably the abandoned whetstone quarries in countries with manufacturing histories, like the UK, would provide a more certain source of good quality stone; as far as I'm aware, no natural scythe whetstones have been manufactured on scale in Australia – like most 'specialised' gear, they'd have been brought in from the mother-country or elsewhere.

Ceramic Stones

I should also mention our ceramic stones. One story related in Henk Bos' work – of an older gent flipping his dinner plate to sharpen a kitchen knife on the unglazed base – inspired me to approach my next door neighbour, a potter, to discuss making whetstones. We've been offering these on our website for a little over a year now,



The inspiration for Bladerunners' ceramic whetstones: using the unglazed rim on the underside of a plate to sharpen a knife.

and we've sold nearly 60 of them in that time (more than any other stone we've stocked to date so far). They cost us \$24 and I was very particular in telling the potter to make it worth his while when he worked out a price. We sell them for \$35 (but I do dress these on a grinder too, so there's time involved there). So even this approach (which is producing something that sits somewhere between natural and synthetic) is arguably financially viable, depending, again, on what the buyer is willing to pay – which, in the absence of other options, is likely to be quite a lot.

I would certainly encourage individual mowers to have a go at creating their own whetstones, though. Spending a couple of hours creating one with basic tools may not be financially viable in terms of what else you could be doing with your time (as compared to buying one from a scythe supplier), but it's not a bad way to spend part of a weekend, and it's immensely satisfying to hone a blade with a whetstone you've made yourself. Grab a stainless steel teaspoon and start testing rocks. Just be sure to use all the right safety gear and be very aware that anything that cuts rock will cut you much, much faster.

Happy honing!

Stadt Schnitters



These slick city scythes are from Vienna where scythes are increasingly used for the upkeep of suburban lawns.

See <https://sensenkurs.wordpress.com/>



The Scythe Revolution: North and South

Problems faced by peasant farmers in some tropical countries are similar to those confronted by European farmers in the Middle Ages. Could the solution again be the scythe? By Simon Fairlie.

European farmers in the early Middle Ages faced an impasse. Agricultural production could not keep up with a rising population, in great measure because there was insufficient manure to fertilize the arable fields. In their *History of World Agriculture*, Mazoyer and Roudart explain the situation these farmers faced:

“The size of the herds was strongly limited by the availability of fodder through the winter. Each autumn, most of the young born in the spring and the unfit animals had to be slaughtered in order to retain only a small number of productive animals during the winter.”¹

There was however no absolute shortage of grass. This reduced herd, reliant on poor winter grazing and what little hay a peasant could gather with a sickle, was nowhere near large enough to consume all the grass available in the outlying pastures in summer. Moreover, while the herd was grazing in the fields it was not providing manure for the farmer — it only did this when folded at night on arable fields.

“During the growing season the largest part of the grass produced on these pastures was effectively lost and could not contribute to fertility of the cultivated lands. In this type of system, cereal crops could not be cultivated widely, were poorly fertilized, and produced small yields.”

The solution to this problem, the authors state, was the replacement of the sickle, as a tool for harvesting grass, by the scythe. Yet this was not a revolution that occurred overnight:

“The scythe appeared in Gaul in the last century BC, and its use was gradually extended to the northern half of Europe during the first millennium AD. The productivity of the scythe is much greater than the sickle but it remained a rare and expensive instrument until around the year 1000, since its manufacture required a mastery of working with iron. In the central Middle Ages, on the other hand, the progress of metallurgy and the rural craft industry made possible the scythe’s more widespread use.”

The spread of the scythe, the authors explain, was also delayed because it was reliant upon other technical advances — improved wheel manufacture for carting the hay from a distance, improved ploughs for incorporating the manure into the soil, and improved horse harness which increased the efficiency of both operations

The increase in fodder harvested by the scythe,



Haymaking in the 15th century. From *The Hours of Henry VIII*.

compared to the sickle, not only made it possible to keep many more animals over winter — it also allowed them to be kept inside day and night over winter, which meant that they deposited all their manure in the farmyard.

“Thus, in an area where the permanent stabling period lasted six months, and where the use of hay permitted the number of animals to quintuple per hectare of pasture, transfers of fertility would become, at the very least, five times greater in summer and ten times greater in winter.”

The increase in available manure and fertility resulted in increased yields and a move from the traditional two course rotation (one crop every two years) to the three course rotation (two crops every three years). It was an agricultural revolution.

Scythes for Hay

There are places in Africa that currently face much the same sort of impasse as that which faced medieval Europeans. Agrarian systems based on swidden agriculture and scratch plowing which successfully supported countless generations before the arrival of Europeans, are now struggling to meet the demands of an increase in population provoked by the cultural disruption which followed colonization.

In most of Africa, if hay is made, it is not to nourish livestock through a cold winter but to feed them through the dry season. However machetes and slashers, the traditional African tools for cutting grass, like the European sickles, cannot mow grass quickly enough to harvest the crop in the very short time available. In Nigeria, according to the FAO, many of the commonest grasses “grow rapidly in the wet season, becoming fibrous and coarse, and are undergrazed because of the large amounts that become rapidly available.” As the dry season advances their crude protein content declines



One of the villages in Burkina Faso where L'Association Jéthro is teaching villagers to make hay with scythes from vegetation growing in the bush. Their mowing and haymaking can be seen on a short video entitled *Le Foin — Une Remède Contre le Faim?* (Hay: a Way to Beat Hunger?)⁴ This film also illustrates the dramatic contrast between the lush vegetation of the rainy season, and the worthless straw that it turns into if it is not harvested at the right moment. The photo of a woman peeing on the front cover of this issue is also from L'Association Jéthro.

from 10 per cent to as low as two per cent. The report concludes “the low nutritive value of natural forage is the major constraint to livestock productivity in the humid zones of West Africa”.²

The situation is much the same in East Africa, where Sjoerd Duiker, scythe instructor on a project in Kenya funded by Pennsylvania University, observes:

Demand for livestock feed is strong in East Africa, due to growth in the dairy sector. Grass is excellent food for livestock if it is grazed or harvested at the right time. If harvested or grazed just before flowering, grass proteins and digestible fibre contents are high. High quality grass, silage or hay reduces the need for feed supplements for high milk production. It therefore becomes very important to harvest grass quickly before it becomes too mature. The traditional slash does not allow fast harvesting, while power mowers are beyond the means of most Kenya. Scythes offer an opportunity to speed up grass harvesting, for direct feeding or the production of silage or hay.”³

As in Europe, the ability to make hay brings with it access to increased volumes of manure. Since the year 2000, a Swiss charity, Association Jethro, has been offering training courses in “bush agriculture” to villagers in Burkina Faso. These courses cover harvesting hay from the bush with scythes, using manure, developing crop rotations and managing livestock. The charity’s website explains:

“At the end of the course, each participant receives tools [including a scythe] which enable them to practice what they have learnt. These tools are in large part manufactured by local craftsmen. If the student has dug a pit for the manure and harvested enough fodder to feed a cow through the dry season, the Association Jethro helps them to buy their first heifer, in effect providing everything that is needed to start a small livestock enterprise.

By becoming “stockmen/growers”, these peasants can use the manure from their cows to fertilize their fields. The results are astonishing: yields often double, and there is no longer any need to buy artificial fertilizers which are so ruinous for peasants and degrade their soils.”⁴

In such cases, the scythe appears to be a key re-



quirement for increasing the productivity of organic arable farming, just as it was throughout much of Europe

It is not only in Africa that peasants are experiencing difficulty harvesting sufficient fodder for their livestock. Tshering Gyaltsen, in a 2002 study of agriculture in Bhutan, wrote:

“The long, dry winter period affects the productivity of livestock. Fodder scarcity is severe from January through April. Production is at its lowest during these months and in the case of yak, milk production is low to nil. Yak herders have also reported high mortality due to fodder scarcity. It is therefore very important that we look into solving fodder shortages”.⁵

It is presumably with this in mind that another Swiss agency has introduced scythes to Bhutanese peasants. However judging from the way they are being used in the photo below, it looks as though these scythes may not last very long. One fears this could be an example of how *not* to introduce scythes to peasant communities

Scythes for Cereals

It took over 1000 years for the scythe to become established throughout Europe as a means of harvesting hay; it took another 750 years for it to be accepted as a tool for harvesting wheat and oats.

This was partly because, in order to compete with the sickle, the scythe has to be equipped with a cradle or



Scythes being used somewhat randomly in Bhutan



Mr Ashok, one of a team of rice farmers in Kanour, who took to the scythe in a big way, and mowed the whole of this field in a couple of hours while the others were at lunch.

a similar device (see photo below) — otherwise the stems of wheat fall every which way, and the time gained mowing them with the scythe, is lost gathering up them into sheafs. As anybody who has tried it can testify, the art of fixing a cradle onto a scythe so that it works efficiently is harder than it might first appear. A further possible reason for the reluctance to use the scythe for reaping, was that, in Britain anyway, the scythe was regarded as a man's tool — and a very skilled and fit man at that — whereas harvesting wheat with a sickle was something that men, women, the aged and youngsters could more easily perform, and hence the harvest was more inclusive and labour was cheaper.

Modern continental scythes are much lighter than the traditional English models, and hence not gender specific. But grafting a cradle onto them makes them more unwieldy and adds a further dimension to the level of skill required to operate it. For this reason Peter Vido is sceptical about introducing farmers to the scythe by using it to harvest grain.

Beginning one's scythe experience with the harvesting of grains is somewhat analogous to "putting the cart before the ox". I am fundamentally not in favor of it. The addition of a grain cradle attached to the snath adds considerable complexity to the learning process. Whenever the stalks do not fall as they should, it is difficult for a novice to identify where the trouble lies.⁶

However there are parts of the world, notably in the Indian subcontinent, where sickles are still used to harvest grain crops, but there is no hay crop to mow, typically because livestock survive on year-round scavenging/grazing and crop residues. Farmers

in these areas, if they are to be persuaded to use the scythe, may have to leap in the deep end and adopt the cradle.

In 2015 Alexander Vido, Peter Vido's brother, toured parts of India demonstrating the scythe mostly to rice and millet farmers. Some of the immediate results can be seen in the photo album of the trip on his website.⁷ A certain Mr Ashok of Kanpur in particular picked up the knack very quickly (pictured above).

Of course it is not the immediate results but the long term ones that count, but in this case Alex Vido is optimistic "The group from Kanpur definitely saw the valuable contribution the scythe would make for small farmers. They have already placed a small order to Gunas Turkish scythe blade manufacturers. Their intention is to spread it across the country."⁸

Appropriate Technology

As yet attempts to introduce scythes are few and far between, and some, perhaps many, are abortive. There are scythe graveyards in Africa, just as there are tractor graveyards, the legacy of ill-considered rural development schemes. A few years ago I received an email from a missionary in East Africa who told me that he had discovered a box of about 20 unused English scythe blades, dating perhaps from the 1950s, lurking in the depths his mission stores — left over from a project that never materialized. How could he put them into use? When I told him that he would need to provide a team leader with at least a week's training, and that he would be better off adopting the continental model of scythe, he wisely dropped the idea.

Since it took a millennium for the scythe to become established as the main haymaking tool in Europe and still longer for it to achieve

acceptance as a grain harvesting tool, one would not expect use of the scythe to spread like wildfire throughout the developing world, however sensible its use might seem. A new tool only becomes "appropriate" when the need for it arises, when other necessary technologies and infrastructure are in place and when it meshes with social norms, such as gender roles.

In an article subtitled "some thoughts on meaningful tool assistance in the 'underdeveloped' regions", Peter Vido warns would-be



A scythe, with a cradle and a motorized grain harvester are compared at the Convention of Agricultural Scientists in Nepal in 2012, as part of Alexander Vido's Scythe Project in Nepal (SPIN).

scythe missionaries that they:

“ought to carefully assess the cultural/psychological and economic constraints that are likely to make the challenge of the undertaking greater than expected, or even impossible to meet . . . It should be done well, or left alone, in hopes that someone else might materialize who will do it well.”⁹

Nonetheless the scythe does offer a singular defence for peasants against the onslaught of petrol-powered technologies that bring with them dependence upon artificial fertilizers and other inputs, indebtedness, and the migration of millions of impoverished and dispossessed peasants to the slums and shanty towns of megacities. As Peter Vido remarks

“Had the scythe been sensibly introduced (by competent-for-the-task people) several generations ago as a partial, niche-specific alternative to the sickle and/or machete in all the ‘developing’ regions of the world, then the existence of millions (yes, millions) of peasants would have been much easier.”⁹

It is late in the day for the scythe revolution to transform the lives of peasant farmers in these countries — but it is never too late to turn to the scythe. The people

and organizations devoting time, energy and money to spreading the news about this wonderful, liberating tool deserve our support.

Much of the information in this article is located through links provided by Alexander Vido on his website <http://scytheworks.ca>. If you wish to help spread the scythe message you can donate to some of these projects.

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A Scythe Mission to Machete Land

Peter Vido was recently invited to introduce scythes to the Sat Yoga Ashram in Costa Rica, and particularly their full-time work crew of ten local farm-raised Costa Ricans. The following is taken from his account, the full text of which will soon be published on <http://scytheconnected.blogspot.co.uk/>

The Ashram manages a permaculture style ecosystem on steep land crossed with ditches and banks where edible crops are interplanted in creative patterns with ornamentals and native flora. Obtaining material for compost making, mulch and erosion control is an ongoing task.

I witnessed much impressive work with machetes -- those useful multipurpose creations. The native men who, it would appear were born with machetes strapped to their sides, keep them decidedly sharper than I had previously seen in Cuba or Dominican Republic. However, I was surprised when told that the ashram’s workers, on average, wear out (or break) two to three blades, each, per year. A machete’s edge, more typically aimed downward, ‘finds’ more earth and rocks than does a scythe blade in experienced hands. In view of the outlay (\$5-10 a piece) for a relatively short period of use, the cost of a (generally much longer lasting) scythe blade seems to offer a very good ratio of “Energy Returned on Energy Invested (EROEI)”.

The Ashram also obsessively manicure certain portions of its grounds to the dictates of the “American Lawn Culture”. Such a lawn can indeed be cut with a machete, but only by bending down at a great cost to some humans’ comfort and health.

In the past I’ve read exclamations to the effect that the African or Latino men “are not averse to working with a bent-over back”. That — after talking to numerous such men from different countries -- I conclude, is uninformed bullshit! Those men do such work because they have to, or believe they have to. Strong and agile as they generally are, many have told me that their backs and right shoulders are routinely sore. Accidents of sometimes serious cuts to the left leg are also not uncommon...

In order to alleviate the drudgery of bending and expedite the manicuring process, the yogis had obtained three brushcutters, at a cost of \$800 each. When I arrived, they were used on a practically daily basis at some place or



another of the extended territory. Again, if the EROEI were to be calculated, the scythe would likely emerge as an undisputed winner — without counting the noise, the vibration, and the shredding of various ‘lower’ beings who live in that greenery.

In any case, already during the first few days of my stay at the ashram, the work crew and some of the yogis were beginning to take to the scythe. Rolando, the supervisor of the workers, a talented jack of all trades, had initially seemed very reserved about the scythe’s introduction. But he made my day when, on his third morning of hands-on experience, trimming a shallow ditch with graceful diagonal strokes, he exclaimed, more to himself than to me: “This is an amazing tool!”.

Some time later, back in Canada, I received an email from a member of the ashram.

“This morning, like many these days, included a delightful hour of mowing in the stillness as the sun broke. The agricultural team will soon be joining us. The rage of the weed-whacker has not been heard from for over a month now. Nobody, even the workers who once rejoiced in weed-whackers, mentions them; the scythe has clearly been universally accepted. Given how workers typically cling to ingrained procedures, this is an enormous achievement!”



Some of the nearly 30 snaths made by Peter Vido while at the Ashram, to deal with the highly variegated terrain.