The Windrow

Windrow NO 20 March 2025

Newsletter of The Scythe Association of Britain and Ireland



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From the Hayrick

For some time now I have been wanting to introduce a letters page in the The Windrow and this issue will include the initial effort. I realise that there is an issue with context as The Windrow is only published each scything season. To address this letters and replies should be sent to the editor by email to itchka@compuserve.com for inclusion in the next issue.

Finding a theme for the front page picture of The Windrow has always been quite challenging I have usually tried to find something historical. However many of the best pictures available on the internet are usually copyrighted and and require a license fee for their use. Frequently one finds the same picture on several different websites which makes me wonder whether this "Copyright" is truly valid. As The Windrow has no budget this severely limits the choice. So what to do? Well at the risk of starting a personality cult I wonder if some pictures of past and present champion scythers in action. I feel that this may represent the new and growing scything community that is now no longer history but is firmly founded in the present. There must be a wealth of "in action" images amongst SABI members collections so if you have any that you feel would serve this purpose then send them to the email above with a short note of who it is, where it was taken and when it was taken (if you know). This issue's front page shows two titans of the scything world in a tussle for supremacy between the English and Austrian scythes.

So then to events; International Peening Day is around the corner and as you can see from the picture a SABI member David Kuegler has been busy building a luxury new peening pony which features an adjustable sliding seat with backrest and includes a Dengeldoofer complete with improved foot operation. Yes I know I've collequialised the name of the device and that's because it doesn't seem to have one (peening apparatus? Hmm) and such a clever device deserves one. Do I need help? Probably!!!

It is pleasing to be able to announce that the Northern Scythe Festival and Championship will happen again this year as there were some doubts last year whether it would continue to be held at Slaidburn. Last year the attendees group mowed an acre! As the grass at Slaidburn is such a delight to mow I am sure everyone will have enjoyed it! I only wish I could have been there.

The premier event of the scything year The Green Scythe Fair continues to be very successful attracting more and more mowers. Last year there were 76 mowers who signed up for the heats this is a tribute to the SABI organisation who champion the scythe in these islands. The new GSF team led by Neil Gerrard did a fantastic job of organisation and the whole day seemed to run very smoothly.

Talking of the Green Scythe Fair Adrian Thomas and myself has decided to offer short refresher course to those who have bought a scythe, taken a beginners course but have done nothing since. Competition advice will also be available to those who may wish to participate in the heats. This will be a short 2 hour session of supervised mowing. Places will be limited to the available grass.

If you have not been to the SABI website or not been recently you may find it worth a visit. Richard Brown in collaboration with some paid help have updated the sites content mangement system and have introduced some new features. Of particular note is the new Courses page which allows a more advance method of course selection by location. Please note that the site is still a work in progress and will continue to be improved over the coming year.

Those of you who were at the Green Sythe Fair last year will probably remember the team of Dutch mowers who gave a demostration of team mowing, Carleen a member of the team has kindly provided an article describing the scything community in her native Holland. There are some mowing picture one

SCYTHING EVENTS

International Peening Day 2025

Sun 6 April 2025 (First Sunday in April)



Luxury Peening Pony By David Kueglar

International Peening Day is an 'everywhere-event' – it's aims are to remind people to prepare their scythes in advance of the mowing season and provide support by encouraging them to get together to peen together. You can share experiences online via the SABI Facebook or email groups

Richard Brown (WidlScythe): I will be hosting an International Peening Day gathering in my home meadow and workshop here in Norfolk. All are welcome to drop in anytime from 10am to 4pm for a bit of peening practices and advice, and a chance to test the results on the spring growth in my meadow.
see https://wildscythe.co.uk/international-peening-day/

Simon Cooter writes
We will be celebrating this auspicious day by gathering at the Stiperstones NNR base for a mass peen. Come along and join us between 10am and 1pm. If you have one bring your own bench or I have 4+ that folk can use. For those relatively new to peening I am very happy to take you through it or repair any damaged blades. I will also have my recently imported German peening machine for those wishing to give it a go. Free event, donations towards tea and coffee welcome.

Cornwall Scything Meet & International Peening D 2025

Sunday April 6th 2025 10:00 - 4:00
A perfect opportunity to prepare your blades for the season. Free Advice & Guidance on hand.
Tea & Coffee Provided.
Kevin Austin, Skyegrove, Coombe Farm, Herodsfoot, Liskeard, Cornwall PL14 4RS
https://skyegrove.co.uk/

Andi Rickard will be hosting a drop-in peening workshop on Sunday 6th April at Somerset Scythe School, TA20 3RF, from 11am to 3pm. No charge but donations welcomed. Go to www.scytheschool.com for more details and directions.
Please let me know at andirickard@me.com if you are wanting / planning to come along.

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of which much surely be judged as a quality of ten! t is of interest to note that competition events in the Netherlands at least where Carleen is based have very different competitions than we do in the UK I hope to encourage her to pen a short article on how they are run and judged. Finally I would like to thank everyone who replied to my email asking for Windrow content. You all have responded magnificantly to the challenge; so much so that on the suggestion of the erstwhile Richard Brown I have sufficient material to be able to publish a second issue of The Windrow this season. The issue will largley focus on the subject of peening that esoteric art that can turn a perfectly ordinary blade into an instrument of delight



GREEN SCYTHE FAIR 2025

THE UK PREMIER SCYTHING EVENT

Incorporating

The 19th West Country Scythe Festival

Sun 8 June 2025 11.00 am – 11.00 pm

Thorney Lakes, Somerset TA10 0DW

Advance ticket sales only.

*Please visit https://www.greenfair.org for tickets, **ALL** course bookings and information: There are no tickets at the gate.*

Scythe Championship
Speakers
Stalls
Kids area
Courses

Scythes and Haymaking
Events
Crafts
Music
Local food and drink

Pre-Fair Courses and Talks

The SCYTHE Improver's Masterclass

6th and 7th June 2025

at the GREEN SCYTHE FAIR, Somerset

Join our three highly EXPERIENCED TUTORS

Phil Batten Master Peener from Scythe Cymru

Andi Rickard UK Champion Somerset Scythe School

Kev Austin UK Scythe Champion from Cornwall

Learn to Scythe and Peen with greater CONFIDENCE & EASE

For those already using an Austrian Scythe at home, work or in a volunteer setting.

MORE INFO / ENQUIRIES: scythemasterclass@gmail.com

Get Started The Right Way

Info: beginnerscythecourse@gmail.com

Beginners Scythe Course

Friday 6th June 10am - 4pm

Programme:

Morning: Safety, Set up, Sharpening and Mowing Technique.
Afternoon: Peening, Scythe Care and Tutored Mowing Practice.

Price £90

Need a Refresher? Want to Compete?

Try the Tutored Mowing Practice Session

Saturday 7th June 10am - 12pm

Price £30

Optional Blade Peening Service £10

Tea and Coffee Provided

Horses in Harness
Leather Axe Mask
Learn To Sew a Pair of Hemp Drawstring Trousers
Eco Poetry Writing Workshop
Sharpening Woodcarving and Other Edge Tools
An introduction to Driving Horses
Spoon Carving
Make a Hay Rake
Bamboo Native American Flute Making

Make your own Earth Pigment Paints
Blacksmithing Workshop
Willow Weaving
Recycled Copper Jewellery Workshop
Copper Smelting Workshops
Tree songs walk with the Hedgesong Collective
The Fungi Cailleach
Introduction to Veteran & Ancient Trees
Using Participatory and Deliberative Democracy



Wandlebury Scything Festival
Incorporating
The Eastern Counties Scything Championship
Wandlebury Country Park
Wandlebury Ring, Gog Magog Hills, Cambridge CB22 3AE
Sunday 20 July, 10am - 4pm

Hosted by kind permission of Cambridge Past Present and Future.

Entry Free. Donations welcome.

There will also be a scything course on the Saturday.
To book go to:-
https://www.cambridgeppf.org/Event/learn-to-scythejuly25

Northern Scythe Festival &
Northern Scythe Chanpionships
Sat 12 and Sun 13 July 2025
Bell Sykes Farm, Slaidburn, BB7 4TP
by kind permission of Peter and Lin Blackwell



PARRYSFIELD 4th SCYTHING FESTIVAL

Orcop Hill, HEREFORD HR28SD
7th-13th July 2025
what3words: ///appealing.plank.sharpness



Some of the best meadow mowing around.
We will be giving green hay away to new meadows too!
We Scythe, Sing, Eat lovely freshly cooked food & of course we talk about a lot of things, not just scything. Oh & we try to laugh lots too! Thursday is Ukulele day/night.
There is camping for tents & vans & a new shower for 2025.

Let David know if you'd be coming Contact: david.kuegler@btinternet.com Message: 07485450402

Scottish Scything Festival
Sat 19th July 2025

Cultybraggan Camp, Comrie, Perthshire

With the huge increase in scything over the last couple of years in Scotland this event is building up to be a classic! With the usual competitions, practice areas, workshops, talks and food and drink we are also going to have a farm games area and hay stack making. There is a scything workshop on the Friday run by experts Andi Rickard and John Grundy. You are encouraged to bring an instrument for the evenings entertainment and your scythe and a keenness to use it on the day itself!!

Camping will be available on Friday and Saturday nights. There are also a few self catering units on the site, for which it is advisable to book soon – http://www.cultybraggancamp.uk/self-catering

For further information contact Rob Brodie at robmaculture@yahoo.co.uk



Tickets go on sale mid April – https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/scottish-scything-festival-2025-tickets-1234484900569

INTERNATIONAL SCYTHING EVENTS

Fête de la Faux
The Second Brittany Festival of the Scythe



Provisional Programme

Saturday:
Workshops for : scythe, hoe , sickle, braiding green rye and straw, sharpening tools, peening workshop and garden planting dicussion, cereals
Equipment stall.

Saturday evening:
Fez-noz and festive meal

Sunday:
Workshops, farmers' market, scything demonstration
competition: Mowing under fences and team mowing.

The programme is still open, so you can, if you wish come and lead a workshop or discussion. (There is an interpreter available) .
Volunteers are welcome.

Price Free but pay what your conscience dictates or what you can afford - Free camping - Meal offered for volunteers. https://faucher.bzh/fete-de-la-faux - contact: julierubiella@gmail.com - +33762938357

Note A Fez-noz is a traditional Breton (from Brittany, France) festival and night party characterized by collective dancing to traditional music and instruments, fostering a sense of community and cultural identity.

European Hand Mowing Championship

6 – 10 August 2025 Thundorf, Bavaria, Germany

Organised by the Thundorf-Straß Hand Mowing Association.

Wed 6 August: Exhibition Day. Comapny and club stands
Thurs 7 August: Guests act "The Daredevils" from Carinthia
Fri 8 August: Wine Festival
Sat 9 August: Gala evening with the awarding of start numbers.
Sun 10 August: The highlight of the week – the mowing competition for youth, women and men classes.

Andi Rickard has written to the Chairman of the host association saying that we would like to enter a British team and asking how we do that. If anyone is interested in taking part, either mowing or supporting, then please contact Andi – andirickard@me.com

Time traveling and Hay Making Camp in Transylvania 10th August - 16th August 2025

Location: Gyimesbükk, Áldomáspataka (Ghimeükk-Fãget, Aldãmaç .
Organizers: Sárig Attila with his family and Carpathian Escapes
Supporters:

The Csángó people living in the Gyimes Valley possess a knowledge that represents an exceptional value for the whole of Europe. The ancient Csángós settled in a wild, remote valley in the Eastern Carpathians and in order to survive they had to develop a special life and land use style that was in harmony with nature.

Hay making is the most important activity in the Gyimes Valley because people here are mainly occupied with animal husbandry. Through decades of work they created some of the most biodiverse mountain hay meadows in the world.





The Hay Making Camp would like to introduce participants into this type of landscape-creating, nature-respecting lifestyle.

Nearly all the food served at the camp is organic because the ingredients are grown and produced by the Sárig family on their own farm by Csángó traditions. The family uses mainly human and animal power to produce food which means that machine usage is kept to a minimum. We hope that these are good reasons for our guests to spend a whole week in “Csánglia” with pleasure.

Participants at the hay making camp can contribute to the survival of this beautiful landscape that became so magical mainly because of traditional hay making. During the six days of the event participants are also invited to get a personal insight into the world and lifestyle of the Csángós.

Everybody is warmly welcome!

Planned programme
The programme is subject to change according to weather conditions!

1st Day, Sunday: in the evening everybody shall meet at the Áldomás Guesthouse in Áldomáspataka Village, Ghimes municipality for welcome and dinner.

2nd Day, Monday: 8 AM breakfast, then a local craftsman show us how to make scythes handels and wooden rakes in traditional way. 1-3 PM lunch and siesta, after that we learn how to mow the grass whit the scythes. At 7 PM dinner, after which guests from abroad are given the possibility to make a short presentation about themselves and to highlight what makes traditional lifestyle valuable.

3rd Day , Tuesday: We'll start the day early in the morning whit mowing the grass on a field next to the village. After the breakfastin a small cheese factory we learn about the cheese making procedure, than we go to pick mushrooms in the surrounding forests. After lunch we'll turning and collecting the hay that has been cut, and if we have more energy, we can continue mowing until 7 pm dinner.

4th Day, Wednesday: 6 AM Early mowing in the morning for early risers. At 9 AM we take breakfast. After breakfast we'll collect the hay mowed last day. After lunch everybody shall prepare for a hike up to the mountain hay meadow. We will make our dinner on a camp fire, and after sundown we prepare our sleeping bags and go to sleep in hay in the hay barns.

5th Day, Thursday: Early start whit mowing in the sunrise on the top of the mountain. Breakfast at 9 AM, then we'll continue mowing. After lunch we make a walk on the mountain meadow to learn about meadow biodiversity with the help of a specialist, than mowing 'til dinner time. Camp fire, sundown watch and sleeping in the hay barns in sleeping bags.

6th Day, Friday: breakfast at 8 AM; most of the day will be spent with gathering the hay, making hay stacks and pulling them to the barns, loading the hay into the barn. In the afternoon we leaves the mountain and will have dinner back at the guesthouse. After dinner evening party with local traditional music and dances.

7th Day, Saturday: breakfast at around 8 AM, followed by a short evaluation of the week, after which farewell and everybody shall head home.

Participation fee: 499 EUR/person. The fee includes simple village accommodation, breakfast, lunch, dinner and participation in the activities and programmes. Children are welcome.

Registration deadline: 01 July 2024. The number of participants is limited to a maximum of 20. A 100 EUR deposit is kindly requested upon registration.

Practical information: this is a Hungarian ethnic region, bring a Hungarian phrasebook. Be prepared for any weather – it changes quickly in the mountains, wear layers, working clothes, sturdy shoes. Gardening gloves and a sun hat and sun cream are recommended.

Please think about nature, and if you can, travel to us whit a train! Railway stations: Miercurea Ciuc, Ghimes.

Nearest airports: Bacau (99 km), Brasov (151 km), Targu Mures (200 km), Sibiu (240 km), Bucharest (293 km); If it is necessary, we can provide an airport transfer.

"Hay meadows provide an immense range of benefits to farming communities and wider society. They create some of Europe's most spectacular scenery and cultural landscapes. Simply to watch this natural, environmental and cultural heritage disappear before our eyes is, surely, not an option we can consider," said HRH the Prince of Wales in a message to our policy seminar at the European Parliament, Brussels, 2012. Watch the video at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGhHtbF6zKk

Contact: For registration, transportation possibilities, optional tours before or after the event or any other detail please contact Sarig Attila, (aldomaspataka@gmail.com.), Tel. 0040727859882 and Carpathian Escapes, https://carpathianescapes.ro/ , 0040770345948



COURSE DIRECTORY

Adrian Thomas*
North Devon
adrianthomas59@gmail.com
I run training courses either at my home in Buckland Filleigh or at a local site of your choice, for individuals or for groups. I sell scythe kit and offer a blade peening service.

Courses:
- Please email for details

County Served:
- Devon

Andi Rickard*
Somerset
andirickard@me.com www.scytheschool.com

Scythe tutor with 13 years teaching experience.
UK ladies champion.
Running courses in the South of England from April to October.
Also available to book in the Midlands / North / Scotland the weeks either side of 19th July.

Courses:
Please go to my website for full course dates and details and to book.

Confirmed dates so far:-

- 6th April -Peening Workshop for International Peening Day
- 12th April - half day Spring recap course
- 26th April - Scything for Beginners
- 27th April - Scything for Improvers
- 3rd May - offering "have a go" sessions at Toby's Garden Festival (Powderham Castle) (Go to Tobygardenfest.co.uk to buy tickets)

County Served:
- Somerset

Beth Tilston*
Forest of Dean
https://bethtilston.co.uk/scythe-courses-in-the-forest-of-dean/

Day long courses and one to ones with a teacher of 10+ years experience. Learn everything you need to get mowing.

Courses:
- Flaxley, Forest of Dean: 20th July
- Blakeney, Forest of Dean: 17th August
- One to ones available in Blakeney, Forest of Dean. Contact bethtilston@googlemail.com
- 30 minute Pay What You Want online course available at https://cloudcottageland.vhx.tv

County Served:
- Gloucestershi

Chris Hayes
Wexford,
Irelandchris@crannogmedia.ie
https://www.scythe.ie

I have been teaching scything for over ten years all over Ireland and sell scythes through my website.
My courses cover everything you need to get cutting confidently and give you the skills necessary to keep your scythe in top condition.

Courses:
Follow on Instagram @scythealive for updates on courses.

Confirmed courses for 2025-
- Irish Seed Savers, Co.Clare May 24th and October 4th
- Lismore Castle Gardens, Co. Waterford June 22nd
- Badgers Hill Farm, Wexford Dates TBC

County Served:
- Midlands East
- South East
- All Ireland willing to travel

Chris Riley*
North Dorset
chris@pratensis.net
http://www.pratensis.net/

With 13 years experience, I provide beginners' courses, as well as bespoke instruction at any level. I sell Austrian scythe equipment. I operate mainly in the Wessex area, but it can sometimes also be feasible to go further afield. See my web site for more information.

Courses:

- Saturday 21st June 2025 – Scything Workshop (9.00am – 1.00pm) – Vallis Farm, Egford, Frome BA11 3JQ
- Friday 27th June 2025 – Meadow Management: Learn To Scythe – Kingcombe Centre, Dorset DT2 0EQ
- Friday 4th July 2025 – Practical Scything for Managing Wildflower Meadows – Wadhurst Park, East Sussex, TN5 6NT
- Saturday 5th July 2025 – Practical Scything for Managing Wildflower Meadows – Wadhurst Park, East Sussex, TN5 6NT
- Sunday 27th July 2025 – Meadow Management: Learn To Scythe – Kingcombe Centre, Dorset DT2 0EQ

County Served:
- Dorset
- Gloucestershire
- Hampshire
- Somerset
- Wiltshire
- All England willing to travel

Clive Leeke*
Berkshire
hedgecraft@theoldfarmyard.co.uk https://www.theoldfarmyard.co.uk/

Fourteen years' teaching experience since qualifying. Courses in scything and wildflower meadow management on own meadow in South Oxon, or on your land by arrangement.

Courses:
- Introduction to Scything. Gallowstree Common, South Oxon. Saturday, 20th July 2024. £85 pp
- Combined Course: Introduction to Scything; Improve Your Scything Technique, With Introduction to Peening Gallowstree Common, South Oxon. Saturday, 7th September 2024. £85

County Served:
- Buckinghamshire
- London W
- Oxfordshire

David Kuegler*
Parrysfield, Orcop Hill, Hereford
david.kuegler@btinternet.com
https://www.instagram.com/parrysfieldorcop/

We cover all aspects of Scything in a fun filled day, either Parrysfield or your meadow. https://www.instagram.com/parrysfieldorcop/
I sell fully prepared Scythe Kits: oiled, peened & sharp!, plus hay rakes & hay forks, & beautiful Peening ponies too!

Courses
- 1:1 Courses anytime/anywhere to suit March-December
- Group Courses up to six scythers, every second Saturday of the month March-October

County Served:
- Worcestershire

Heather Beaton
Lochalshheather.beaton@lochash.uk

Scythe courses run on the community land of the Plock. One-day courses cover the basics in scythe set up, peening and sharpening and mowing. One to one courses can be arranged, as can courses at a location of your choice. All proceeds go to community projects within Lochalsh.

Courses: Please contact the above email address.

County Served:
- Highlands and Islands

Helene Ducrotoy and Danny Hodgson
Near Whitland, West Wales
hand.powered@yahoo.com
www.handpowered.co.uk

Courses provided by two tutors to groups of up to 11 attendees. 1- day and multiple day courses in scything technique, maintenance, hay making and meadow management. Courses are suitable for beginners or experienced scythers and we are happy to travel to meadows anywhere in the UK. Scythes available for purchase at courses.
We specialise in repurposing and restoring vintage scythes. Restoration includes repair or reconditioning of blades and production and repurposing of snaths. We also sell custom-made scythes with hand-made snaths produced from local wood.

Courses: See website & email info above

County Served:
All England & Wales

John R Grundy*
Northumberland
contact@wildernesstamed.com https://www.wildernesstamed.com/scything

Training groups and individuals from conservation charities, friends of groups and small holders. More information at and

Courses: Information and bookings see above

County Served:
- Durham
- Lothian & Borders
- Northumberland

Kevin Austin*
Cornwall
kevin@skyegrove.co.uk https://skyegrove.co.uk/

For all your scything needs, training and equipment, specialising in the use of the Austrian scythe. Bespoke courses for singles, couples and groups and tailored for beginners and improvers

Courses:
- Cornwall Scything Meet & International Peening Day 2025 ~ Sunday April 6th 2025 10:00 — 4:00
- Saturday 10th May 10.00-4.00 Beginners Course
- Saturday 17th May 10.00-4.00 Beginners Course
- Saturday 31st May 10.00-4:00 Beginners Course
- Saturday 5th July 10:00-4:00 Beginners Course
- Saturday 19th July 10:00-4:00 Beginners Course
- Saturday 26th July 10:00-4:00 Beginners Course
- Scythe Masterclass at the Green Scythe Fair
- Saturday 24th May and Saturday 12th July 2025

County Served
- Cornwall:
- Devon

Mary Ellis*
southeastscything@gmail.com
www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61564912050178

Learn to scythe in a day with others, or tailored 1 to 1 tuition in
scything, sharpening and peening, in Kent, Sussex and Surrey. Learn the joy of an ancient skill. Please email southeastscything@gmail.com for more info.
"I have never seen anyone pick up a scythe and not smile."

Private and individual courses by arrangement.
Austrian and English scythe courses and restoration of English scythes.
Courses are delivered by two tutors to individuals or groups (11 max). 1-day and multiple day courses in scything technique, maintenance, hand hay-making and meadow management. Talks also delivered in meadow conservation.
Scythes available to purchase at courses.

Courses:
'Learn to Scythe in a Day' courses
- Sat 17th May, Wittersham, Kent, TN30 7PX.
- Fri 25th July, c/o Surrey Wildlife Trust, Compton, Surrey, GU3 1EG.

Bookings at
www.surreywildlifetrust.org/events/2025-07-25-introduction-scything.

Dates to be confirmed:
- 5th May & early Sept Woodchurch Kent TN26 3PF
- Early Augst Betchworth Surrey RH3 7DN.
- Late Augst Hurstpierpoint West Sussex BN6 9BD.
- Late Sept Nymans Handcross W Sussex RH17 6EB

We provide external courses at your venue

County Served:
- All England, Scotland and Wales

Neil Foulkes
Co. Leitrim, Ireland
neilfoulkes62@gmail.com

Formal and informal workshops on mowing and maintenance, including through local authorities. Mainly covering NI and the border counties. I also sell Austrian scythes and equipment

Courses:
- Please email to the address above.

County Served:
North West
Northern Ireland

Nicole Clough*
Oxfordshire
/https://joyofscything.uk/

I provide training in the use, maintenance and joy of the Austrian scythe, within Oxfordshire, nearby counties and southern Midlands, and further afield on request. Please visit my website for 2025 venue dates or to enquire about arranging a bespoke session.

Courses:
- Saturday, 14 June – Cogges Manor Farm, Witney, Oxfordshire – Available to book via Cogges website.
- July and August dates – TBC – Egrove Park, Oxford, Oxfordshire. Bookings and enquiries for this course are direct through me. To learn more about this haven for wildlife located on the southern edge of Oxford, have a look at this article by the Grounds Manager.
- Saturday, 30 August – Cogges Manor Farm, Witney, Oxfordshire – Available to book via Cogges website.
- Please subscribe to my mailing list to receive course information at https://joyofscything.uk/courses2/

County Served:
- Oxfordshire
- Buckinghamshire
- Gloucestershire
- Hertfordshire
- London W
- Northamptonshire
- Warwickshire
- West Midlands
- All England willing to travel

Philip Batten*Dyfed Permaculture Farm Trust, Carmarthenshire
info@scythecymru.co.uk https://www.scythecymru.co.uk/

Learn to scythe or improve your skills, learn to peen from a master peener.
Workshops give you – hands on experience; a chance to "try before you buy"
or get your own scythe set up well; a visit to a smallholding where the
scythe is integral to the management and is used year round in a variety of
situations.

Courses:
- For Introductory workshops see www.scythecymru.co.uk/product/introductory-scythe-course/
- For Peening workshops see www.scythecymru.co.uk/product/peening-sharpening-workshops/

County Served:
- South West Wales

Rachel Remnant*
Winchester, Hampshire
rachel@landloreconsulting.com https://www.landloreconsulting.com/

Expert habitat advice, with a specialism in floodplain meadows and community engagement.
I teach an Introduction to the Austrian Scythe and can provide 1:1 tutoring or teaching and contract mowing for meadows.

Courses:
- Sun 7th April 11am – 3pm Winchester, Hampshire. International Peening Day, £35
- Wed 9th April Wormholt London, An Introduction to the Austrian Scythe, £95
- Mon 14th April Winchester Hampshire. An Introduction to the Austrian Scythe, £95
- Thurs 24th April Fulham London An Introduction to the Austrian Scythe, £95
- Sun 27th April Winchester Hants. An Introduction to the Austrian Scythe, £95
- TBC Fri 9th May The Vyne Sherborne St John Hants An Introduction to the Austrian Scythe £95
- TBC Fri 16th May, The Vyne, Sherborne St John, Hampshire. An Introduction to the Austrian Scythe, £95
- Mon 2nd & 3rd June nr Winchester Hampshire Immersive meadow and Austrian scythe course inc camping £240
- Fri 18th July Winchester Hampshire. An Introduction to the Austrian Scythe £95
- Mon 8th September Winchester Hampshire. An Introduction to the Austrian Scythe £95
- Sun 5th October, Winchester, Hampshire. An Introduction to the Austrian Scythe, £95

County Served:
- Hampshire

Richard Brown*
Kings Lynn, Norfolk
richard@wildscythe.co.uk
https://wildscythe.co.uk/calendar/

I offer courses and individual tuition in East Anglia and East Midlands. As an experienced Botanist, Ecologist and seedsman I can tailor courses to include both practical scythe instruction as well as meadow management theory. I sell scythes and offer fitting and peening services from my scythe workshop and meadow.

Courses:
Scheduled Scythe and grassland management courses in June July and August. Other individual and group courses and tuition available by arrangement see https://wildscythe.co.uk/calendar/

- 6th April – International Peening Day – event. Lovells Hall, Norfolk, PE34 4PL.
- 17th May – Scythe maintenance, peening and setup workshop. Norfolk, PE34 4PL

cont:

- 18thJune – Learn to scythe and grassland management course. Norfolk, PE34 4PL
- 2nd July – Learn to scythe and grassland management course. Norfolk, PE34 4PL
- 10th July – Learn to scythe and grassland management course. Beds. MK44 2JU
- 16thJuly – Learn to scythe and grassland management course. Heacham, Norfolk, PE31 7LJ
- 23rd July – Learn to scythe and grassland management course. Reepham, Norfolk, NR10 4RA
- 13thAugust – Learn to scythe and grassland management course. Heacham, Norfolk, PE31 7LJ
- 4th October – Autumnal Aftermath Scythe Session. Lovells Hall, Norfolk, PE34 4PL

County Served:
- Cambridgeshire
- Leicestershire
- Lincolnshire
- Norfolk
- Suffolk

Rob Brodie
Fife, Scotland
robmaculture@yahoo.co.uk
https://quietertimes.org

Beginners and Improvers scything workshops suitable for anyone interested in using a scythe to manage green spaces. Blade repair and peening service available too. Please email to arrange a workshop, a blade repair enquiry and for more information. Also visit https://quietertimes.org for more details and to see current workshop dates.

Courses:
Please email or see website

County Served:
- Lothian & Borders

Ross Adams*
Totnes, South Devon
ross@abundantgardens.uk https://www.abundantgardens.uk/courses/

I run fun and informative courses covering everything needed to get you mowing efficiently and effectively. I have courses for beginners and improvers, I also offer 1-1's, 1-2's and I can run a course on your land. For more information have a look at my website https://www.abundantgardens.uk/courses/

Courses:
- April 5th Foxhole community garden, Dartington
- May 17th Foxhole community garden, Dartington

County Served:
- Devon

Simon Cooter*
The Stiperstones National Nature Reserve
simon.cooter@naturalengland.org.uk

Site manager for the Stiperstones National Nature Reserve, courses are usually run from the nature reserve base where practice can be carried out on a variety of vegetation and slopes.
All proceeds go to the management of the nature reserve.

Courses:
- Introductory Scything and meadow management course, Sunday 22nd June, 10am -4pm. £70pp
- Introductory Scything and meadow management course, Monday 27th July, 10am -4pm. £70pp. (followed by optional free scything sessions all week).

County Served:
- Shropshire

Simon Fairlie*
Teign Valley near Exeter
07778898031 scythes@myphone.coop
https://www.thescytheshop.co.uk

Scythe courses covering basic skills, haymaking, grassland management and jig and freehand peening. One or two days. Complete range of scythe equipment available to buy. One-to-one tuition by appointment. Also three-day course with Kevin Austin: Outdoor Manual Tools for Novices, including scythes, forestry, hedging and garden tools etc

Courses:
One or two day courses Including grassland management and haymaking.At
- Fairhill Farm, Pound Lane, Bridford EX6 7LQ 24-25 May 2025
- Fairhill Farm, Pound Lane, Bridford EX6 7LQ 26-27 July 2025

Three day course with Kevin Austin:
- Outdoor Manual Tools for Novices, 12-14 September 2025
- One-to-one tuition by appointment.

County Served:
- Cornwall cont:
- Devon
- Dorset
- Hampshire
- Somerset
- Wiltshire

Steve Tomlin*
Manchester
stevetomlin8@gmail.com
https://steveTomlinCrafts.co.uk/learn-to-scythe

Practical, fun courses covering all the skills to use and maintain your scythe. I have been teaching scything since 2010, am author of 'Learn to Scythe' and sell scythe kits. I can travel to teach you or your group at your venue.

Courses:
Book your place on Eventbrite: Learn to Scythe
- 25 May, Foxglove Covert LNR, N. Yorkshire
- 31 May, Bell Sykes Farm, Slaidburn, Lancashire
- 14 June, Brigflatts Meeting House, Sedbergh, Cumbria
- 20 July, Bell Sykes Farm, Slaidburn, Lancashire
- 1 August, Broadrake, Chapel-le-Dale, Yorkshire Dales
- 20 September, Brigflatts Meeting House, Sedbergh, Cumbria

County Served:
- Cheshire
- Cumbria
- Derbyshire
- Greater Manchester
- Lancashire
- North Wales
- Staffordshire
- Yorkshire - South
- All England willing to travel

Susanne Raven*
Co Cork, Ireland
rowanlily@yahoo.de http://www.susanneraven.ie/

I run improvers' courses and scythe clinics for individuals or small groups of people. I also offer scythe mowing and peening services and can provide information regarding scything in Ireland.
You're welcome to join the Facebook group An Faobhar – Scythe Group Ireland at:
https://www.facebook.com/groups/215248119929200

Courses:
- Improvers' Scythe Course at Fota, Co. Cork, Saturday 29th March, 10am-4pm.
  For bookings, please visit:-
  https://bookings.fotahouse.com/Event/FHEV02

County Served:
- Cork & Kerry
- All Ireland willing to travel

LETTERS

This is the new Windrow letters page hopefully to start some interesting discussions on scything related subjects.
If you like to write or respond to letters for this page please address your correspondance to itchka@compuserve.com with WLETTERS somewhere in the subject.

New Peening Service at the Green Scythe Fair
I am establishing a peening service on the Sunday at the Green Scythe Fair at the Scythe Tent. The main intention of this is to support those who scythe irregularly enough that having their own peening set up, and/or development and maintenance of necessary skill is too much. An annual MOT and info point for developing scythers and peeners seems like it could meet a need. Of course, the service will be open to all manor of blade and peening needs, including competition blades. If you want to bring blades along to get peened or know people that need their blades done, please bring them! And as this is a new venture, if you have any feedback or in-put I am very open to hearing from you.

Richard Toogood – 07594 506084
toogood127@hotmail.com
An abundance of regional snath designs

Steve Leppold writes
An abundance of regional snath designs
Switzerland is a small country, about half the size of Scotland, and yet Swiss scythers have the choice of 24 different wooden snath designs currently being offered by the company Sahli (sahli-ag.ch). Each of the snath designs is associated with a specific region of Switzerland.

Different types of scything competition.
Dear Sirs,
Last year I attended the Green Scythe Fair and witnessed the scything championships and the team mow and it caused me to wonder where there were any other types of scything competition that exist? I say this because it seems to me that to succeed in the current competition requires considerable strength and stamina as well as a well prepared scythe . While with preactice most scythers can prepare a working scythe setup not all are blessed with the dual combination of strength and stamina.
Anon

Quality judging
Fellow scythers, I write regarding the methods and standards of judging quality in the competition arena. As quality directly affects the result of competition it would seem wise to standardise this across the UK. I do not know what the system is in use Ireland but I do know that in Scotland a different system of scoreing quality exists. Whilst the judgement of quality is somewhat subjective there do not seem to be any guidelines available from SABI. It would seem to me that with the number of entrants to the competitions on the increase it would seem timely to address this.
Colin Close

This is Hilda.
She is a cartoon pinup character from the 1950's by American cartoonist Duane Bryers.

I publish this because it is a joyful picture and is not intended to offend anyone of any gender.

You can read about the artist here:-https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duane_Bryers

I had had this image for some years and have debated over and over again in my mind whether to publish it or not. Always my courage failed me. I put out to the community now in the hope that it will be accepted as intended.



A Sythe Story
By
William Sutherland

As a teenager in 1960 I was introduced to the scythe (the Northumbrian/Scottish A-frame) by local game-keeper and part-time greenkeeper at my local golf course, Jock Arnott. Jock was a man of few words but great wisdom and. He used his scythe with an effortless grace.

Jock showed me how to sharpen the scythe with a cigar-shaped whetstone (about 120 grit) which he kept in a back pocket. He used the stone in small firm circles all along the length of the blade, We always took a little time to make sure we had a good edge before mowing commenced – sometimes using a coarse file to remove metal quickly if the scythe had had extensive use the previous day.

When I moved to Ireland in 1993 to promote self-sufficiency with John Seymour, my scythe cut 2 acres of hay each year as well as managing the grass in our orchard. Today my scythe manages yet another orchard and woodland as well as taking centre stage in the many scything workshops and demos which I have been giving regularly for the past 30 years.

I now like to regard myself as an active scything "evangelist" because I truly believe that learning this skill can be (and often is) a passport to a new way of living. My own experience with the Scottish A-frame scythe has convinced me that this traditional design, evolving over hundreds of years as it has, provides many advantages. The traditional sharpening techniques I teach and promote do not involve "peening" and this is a welcome revelation for many newcomers to the skill.

It is clear, of course, that the three main types of scythe (English, Austrian and Scottish) have evolved in different ways over many years. The English and Austrian scythes have long (typically 160cm) snaiths which enable cutting a wide swathe in hay meadows.

The Northumbrian or Scottish scythe has a much shorter (typically 110cm) snaith and I find much less strength is required to pull the blade through the stroke. On the Scottish A-frame scythe the whole unit is securely and strongly bolted and glued together – it's a not a short job to hammer down the ring and remove the blade of an A-frame scythe. The blade is secured by tight fitting ring, wedge and stay. The stay is not just for strength - its main purpose is to prevent cut material becoming lodged behind the heel of the blade at the end of each stroke. Personally, I also find them easier to control because the handles are fixed wide apart. This is ideal for heavy work mowing thistles, bracken, brambles, nettles, docks etc. especially when reaching up.

As far as sharpening is concerned, we have a major



difference in tradition. The hard (relatively heavy) English blades fitted to Scottish snaiths were designed to be kept sharp with a whetstone and grindstone. The thin spring steel riveted Tyzack blades kept their edges well but they were relatively heavy.

When I learned to scythe in the 1960s nobody had ever heard of "peening" - we simply used a 120-grit cigar-shaped whetstone and relied on the sap and dew in the meadow to provide lubrication. We turned over the scythe, snaith on the ground, and worked on the underside of the blade with firm circular movement until a tiny burr was created on the top side. The burr was then stropped away (honed) with a few swift light passes on both sides – always stroking away from the body to create a microscopic "saw blade" edge that would cut most effectively. This process took less than 5 minutes and could be supplemented by first using a chain saw file (instead of the stone) if the edge had been significantly worn or damaged in previous use.

When high quality Austrian blades became more widely available in the UK about 20 years ago their light weight and durability was remarkable. We adopted these new blades fitting them to the traditional Scottish pattern A-frame scythes snaiths I now make and sell, but we continue to sharpen them in just the same way as we always had and were very impressed with the results. Perhaps we had to touch up the blades more frequently than with the old spring steel or forged blades but it only took a few moments and their performance was generally excellent. The blades with a "stone tip" are particularly robust!
Will Sutherland



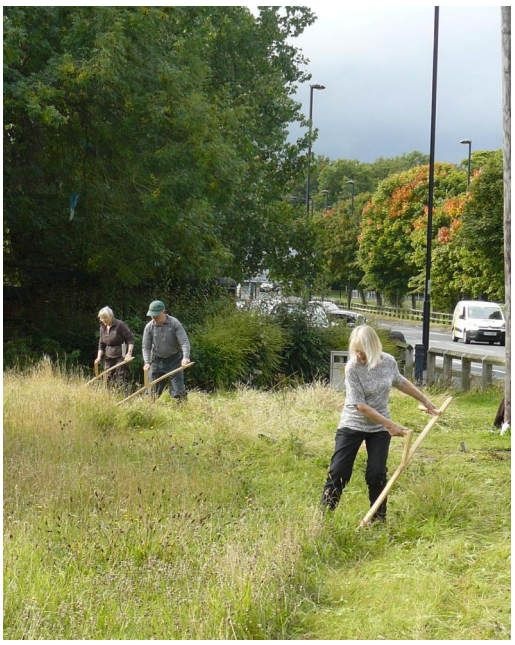
Will Sutherland is co-author of "The Complete Book of Self Sufficiency" . More information about his work and courses can be found at:www.self-sufficiency.net

Spital Tounges
by
Rachel Locke

Spital Tongues, a short distance north west of the city centre of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, reportedly owes its name to the two tongues of land that Edward I gifted to the St Mary Magdalene hospital: “a place called Spitell-Tongs, adjoining to Castle Fields."
It is in this historic, urban setting that, in 2013, Newcastle City Council and the Freemen of Newcastle ‘gifted’ a local resident, keen botanist and member of Newcastle Green Spaces Initiative group, with a small area of amenity mown grassland at Fountain Row, to manage as a wildflower area, for the benefit of local wildlife and people. The aim of Newcastle Green Spaces Initiative group is to enhance small areas of amenity grassland in Newcastle to reduce use of herbicides and support wildlife.



With the help of council staff and Newcastle University volunteers, Lydia was able to make a start on what would become a labour of love for more than a decade. The first year saw the plot sown with Yellow Rattle and in later years with locally-sourced meadow wildflower seed.
While some plots elsewhere across the city are cut back twice a year with a strimmer or mower, Lydia was keen to adopt a more traditional practice with a lower environmental impact for the Fountain Row plot.
In 2015, Lydia invested in a scything training course, led by Steve Tomlin, and an Austrian scythe, with funding from Newcastle City Council. She then began honing her skills on the Fountains Row plot, forming a mowing team with other scythe course trainees.



While the plot was originally about 500m2 and supported just 20 plant species, it has diminished somewhat in size over the years, as overzealous grounds maintenance staff have gradually cut bigger borders around the edges. But what it has lost in size, it has more than made up for in species richness. Up to 91 plant species can now be found on the plot, including Bee orchids. Every winter, an area of the plot is left uncut to provide shelter for invertebrates to overwinter.
Anything from Cinnabar moths and Green Veined White butterflies to Plasterer bees and Five Spotted Flutter flies have found a shelter and food in the long grasses and flowering plants. It is encouraging to see insects breeding amongst the grasses, with empty pupa cases adorning many of the stems.
Scything the plot, which is situated a stone’s throw from the BBC studio, not only attracts some choice comments from passersby, but provides an opportunity to socialise with likeminded individuals in the outdoors, albeit in an urban setting. Urban ‘wildflower meadows’ face significant challenges, with threats forever looming from over zealous lawn mowers, littering, fly-tipping and dog fouling. But a rather more unexpected threat came in 2024 when the Freemen of Newcastle unexpectedly planted six trees on the plot, without any warning to Lydia, who had, by this time, been managing the plot for 11 years. Although a request was made to remove the trees, which cast shadow on what was an open, sunny spot, Lydia has been told the trees will remain on the wildflower plot, despite the impact they will have on the floristic diversity and much to the dismay of those who have lovingly managed the area for wildflowers over the years.

The Fountain Row has had its fair share of fame, winning a RHS ‘It’s Your Neighbourhood’ award in 2014 and featuring on Springwatch in 2022. It has also featured in Look North interviews, as well as an article in the Guardian on the perils of urban pesticides.

Local groups regularly visit the plot as part of environmental engagement sessions, to learn how to better manage green spaces to support biodiversity Both children and adults have enjoyed guided walks, learning about the flowers, grasses and insects that the plot supports.

Lydia’s success at Fountain Row has been inspirational and it is heartening to think that managing this small area of grassland, with all its flowers and insects, as a traditional meadow in 2025, is somehow paying homage to the old Castle fields and meadowlands that would have once adjoined Spital Tongues. Perhaps it is even more heartening to think how many people may have taken up a scythe after seeing Lydia lovingly caring for this special place.

Mowing in the Netherlands: The Zeisbrigade from Groningen

By
Carleen de Graaf

It was in 2010 when a couple of pruning volunteers from Groningen found a scythe in the back of a toolshed. When giving it a try in the field, they beat the grass flat instead of mowing it. The blade was not sharp and they did not know what to do with it. Eager to learn how to peen, they went on a quest through the countryside for information about this hand tool. The search party stumbled upon an old farmer who was willing to show them the basics. Gradually their knowledge grew as more enthusiasts were joining their group, all bringing their own expertise. Their secret? An amicable atmosphere combined with the love for the scythe and an unhurried approach. The following epistle tells you more about the Zeisbrigade, a group of volunteer scythers, and how we have got our (community) mowing organised.

Meaningful volunteer work

Groningen is the name of both the province and its capital city, in the most northeastern part of the Netherlands. Our Zeisbrigade ('Scythe Brigade') is operating under Landschapsbeheer Groningen (LBG), a foundation that promotes ecological development and management of the (cultural) landscape in the province of Groningen (the Netherlands are divided in 12 provinces and each one has their own comparable 'landschapsbeheer' foundation, although



they are all organised differently – only Groningen, Overijssel and Flevoland have scything groups). LBG is a project driven organisation that focuses on the following themes: landscaping, involvement of the local community, biodiversity and cultural history. They are officially registered as a charity foundation with an ANBI-status ('Algemeen nut beogende instelling', which translates into something as 'an institution for general beneficial purposes' and is partly subsidised by the government).

One of their key objectives is making meaningful volunteer work possible. They have a couple of 'brigades' under their wing: in addition to our Scythe Brigade also a 'Pruning brigade' (with a focus on the pruning of old fruit trees in orchards) and a 'Landscape brigade' (they perform a wide variety of maintenance tasks, such as the cleaning of natural bodies of water, building breeding heaps for grass snakes, cutting willows etc.).

Everybody can join

The Zeisbrigade coordinates itself independently from LBG. The volunteers vary in age (30-80 years old) and have different backgrounds: some have 'green jobs' such as ecologist or landscaper, but the majority come from different lines of work: there is a constructor, a farmer, a piano technician, a policeman, a store manager, a financial consultant... This makes the group a colourful and diverse team of people.

The volunteer mowers all bring their own expertise: some are peening experts on their preferred type of anvil, others master the 'dengel apparaat' quite well, while others have valuable instruction skills, build peening ponies or maintain our website. Our core team consists of roughly 15-20 experienced scythers who attend the mowing days frequently. They all signed a volunteer contract and are entitled to a set of LBG work clothes. Apart from this core team, there is a large group of 'outer-circle mowers' who attend only once in a while or only on certain locations. This



is all fine, one is not obliged to attend often, or be a great mower – everybody is welcome. Some people assist by raking the hay, others make coffee/tea or just encourage us with love and fascination.

Diverse jobs

Within season (approx. June-November) we mow almost every week, sometimes twice, usually on Saturdays. Our head coordinator Christ van Beek accepts, checks and plans the mowing jobs and maintains our agenda – also on a voluntary basis.

Without all the time and effort Christ puts into it, the Zeisbrigade would not be able to exist in its current form. Every six weeks or so, he sends out an email to all volunteers with the upcoming mowing dates and aspects of the various jobs (number of mowers required, characteristics of terrain, suitability for beginners, etc.). Those who are interested can sign up to attend.

The parties providing us with mowing jobs are mostly keepers of local community gardens, allotment associations, neighbourhood orchards or other privately owned estates. Frequently our work area extends beyond Groningen into the neighbouring provinces as well (Drenthe, Friesland). Occasionally small jobs in nature reserves are on the agenda too, however we would like this to be more frequent. The clients pay a mowing fee to LBG, who in turn provide the mowers with accident insurance and travel expenses.

The Zeisbrigade gives demonstrations on a regular basis, during regional farmer festivals or historic



artisan days. Sometimes we are invited to join special projects. One of our highlights last year was participating in the 'ancient floodline mow': a land art project by artist Trudy Oosterhuis who wanted to portray how the sea entered the land in the old days, before man started to claim land and created polders. It was filmed with a drone and a video was made of the project.

At the beginning of the mowing season we organise scything and peening courses for beginners. Participants pay LBG to enrol and the mowers tutor on a voluntary basis (they do get a small gift voucher). Fresh scythers are encouraged to try different types of snaths (Dutch and/or Austrian) and configurations (long or short blades). Experienced mowers are present to instruct two trainees each. After the course, the pupils are invited to join us on mowing days to keep on practising to master the skill of scything – and some of them do, to become our new pros.

Tending our tools

The group owns a couple of community scythes, paid for by LBG, who are mostly used during courses or for newcomers. They are maintained by a couple of our core team members and are transported to and from the mowing days in a trailer by the 'day coordinator'. At mowing days, there will often be peening activities as well (some of us mow, some of us peen). If there are any newcomers on the list, we appoint them a companion for the day. The more experienced mowers own their own scythe and peening tools. They often bring a couple of spare scythes with them, for those without one to use.



Zeisbrigade – overview in figures

2023: 32 activities
- 17 mowing jobs, 6 demos, 4 courses, 1 peening workshop, 1 practise day, 2 championships, 1 trip to the 'zeistornooi' in Belgium
- Total number of participants: 353 (varying from 4 to 20 participants per activity)
- 40 new scythers learned to mow, 39 learned to peen

2024: 31 activities
- 14 mowing jobs, 10 demos, 2 courses, 1 practise day, 3 championships, 1 trip to the GSF
- Total number of participants: 357
- 22 new scythers learned to mow, 19 learned to peen

Growing interest

As the craftsmanship of scything and peening has all but slipped into oblivion, also in the Netherlands, we predominantly act as ambassadors. That's why we give demos on a regular basis during events organised by others, to show the public that even today the scythe is still a very useful tool that hasn't lost any of its practicability. Scything agrees nicely with the increasing interest in ecological methods of grassland management, which results in more and more people engaging in our activities: currently there are over 250 people on our mailing list.

Our scythe group's size, and number and type of activities are not representative of scythe groups in other parts of the Netherlands. I am not sure how others have got things organised, but my guess is that other initiatives are often more local and smaller in scale. The Netherlands do not (yet) have a national organisation that promotes scythe use and cultivates communication between parties, as SABI does for Britain and Ireland. Apart from one or two professional scythe schools, scything in the Netherlands is mainly performed by volunteers and individual land owners. But who knows what the future will bring…

Tools and Tradition

By

Helene Ducrotoy and Danny Hodgson

Rural life before fossil fuel use was centred around a high density of workers/ helpers and good tool manufacture, use and upkeep.

The making of tools was usually the prerogative of the blacksmith of the nearest village. The blacksmith had a high social status and his skills were highly prized and recognised. Apprentices would work for the smith for many years before setting out to find a town or village in need of a blacksmith. The learning process was arduous, relatively poorly remunerated and often thankless. Many blacksmith's sons became blacksmiths, as in many other walks of life. Climbing the social ladder was sometimes possible by marriage, but was rarely possible otherwise. According to those who recorded such things at the time (writers, journalists, social commentators, accountants and rent collectors), it was rare for women to to be blacksmiths, however there may have been more female blacksmiths than what the records let us believe.

The use of tools, such as the billhook or the scythe was learnt by almost all members of a rural community. They began learning as children (perhaps 10 or 11 years of age) as helping the adults was expected of children as soon as they had the motor skills to do so. Children often helped on the family farm outside of school hours, and in many communities, children were permitted to skip school during important dates of the farming calendar: sowing of fields with potatoes, oats, barley, wheat etc., potato harvest, wheat harvest, pig slaughter etc. However, when it came to the hay harvest, this was done progressively throughout the late spring and summer months. The family would have spent only a small fraction of their day doing the hay harvest, and other jobs such as livestock husbandry and vegetable growing would have taken the better part of the rest of the day. The family would be helped by migrant workers or itinerant farmhands who would spend their summer walking with their scythes, sickles and hay rakes from one farm to the next offering their skills in exchange for food, a bed and if they were lucky, some actual money. These workers were usually males, however, as for the blacksmiths, perhaps the female farmhands didn't make it into the records that historians use to get their information from today. Not only were these workers usually male, they were usually stronger and fitter than the average farmer. Their lifestyle of physical labour and walking from job to job (with the occasional hitching of rides on the back of horse and oxen-drawn carts) from an early age would have meant their frames would be very lean and muscly. They would also be highly skilled in the arts of scything/ grain harvesting by sickle, hedge-laying and other work that requires a deep understanding of the work and the specific idiosyncrasies of the tools. A small but significant part of each day would be spent in the upkeep of the tools that had been used that day, by both the family and the farmhands. Anyone who has ever used highly specialised tools knows that they need regular sharpening, oiling and repair. In the case of the scythe, a grinding wheel would even be taken out into the fields or meadows to ensure the blades stayed sharp throughout the day. Tools would be passed down from father to son, master to apprentice or between friends and they would be used with such frequency and skill that the handles would become worn and thinner in the sections where most use was needed. The farmhands would hone their skill and share trade secrets as they crossed the countryside in loosely formed groups looking for work. Of which there was plenty in the summer months, a large extended family being unable to carry out all of the different tasks required on a thriving farm during the most productive season. There are records in parish documents that frequently state that the completion of the hay crop was delayed not only by poor weather but also due to want of labour. In Autumn and Winter, the errant farmhands would return to their family home and work on their own family's farm until the next spring when they would start travelling once again. Those without a family (something which was common in the days when antibiotics were not yet discovered and many women died in childbirth) would settle on a farm which had enough work for them over the less productive months too.

Tools such as billhooks, scythes, axes and saws all show regional variation and each region's blacksmith showed great pride and skill in the making of tools. It took a blacksmith a relatively long time to make a tool for someone but it was understood that the tool would outlive its user. Low cost- low quality items were unheard of, as was consumerism and mass-production. The inputs would all be locally sourced - charcoal would be sourced from local coppice forests, water from nearby water sources and the metal would most likely be from an old unusable tool or object brought to the blacksmith by the rag and bone man. Waste did not exist like it does today. Everything that could be recycled, was.

When large scythe producers and other makers of tools such as billhooks appeared during the industrial revolution, everything changed. Mass production in assembly lines meant tools lost their custom fitting and were standardised so did not take into account how tall or strong the user was. These companies did make a wide range of models to suit regional variation in tool shape as they soon came to understand that there was fierce pride in a Devonian using a Devon pattern billhook and so on. Another aspect of the mass-produced tools was that the process was made more efficient by streamlining the production stages

and used cheaper materials. Consistency was key with the mass-produced tools, therefore, for the example of the scythe, the snath (the handle) was kept thick. The thick snaths ensured consistency in the steam bending process so the snaths would all hold their shape and look the same, and ensured they would take the brunt of rough work which was becoming the main use of the tool now that horse-drawn and later, tractor-drawn equipment took over the bulk of the field work. The tools, though they were cheaper and more uniform in appearance, were unfortunately far inferior to those made in the preceding centuries. They were heavier arguably, uglier. Eventually, the Americans took over production, using Hickory for the snath.UK producers could not compete with the American producers as the latter had access to large areas of fast-growing Hickory. The Ash grown in small coppices managed in the UK, though lighter and stronger, could not be grown as economically as the American equivalent. Many of the scythes found today in museums and discovered in old barns are the American models. Our company, Handpowered, is attempting to rekindle a passion for fossil-fuel free grass and crop management using the light and ergonomic Austrian scythe as well as restored English scythes.

Our aim is to promote a more sustainable future. One where we can value and appreciate hand-made, locally sourced products. Where people and the environment are interlinked and the joy that this union can bring is recognised. Where people are helped to carry out satisfying and rewarding work. There is no need to romanticise the past or to advocate turning back the clock, but there is a need to explore every avenue of human ingenuity as we move into a greener future where we are able to become less reliant on external inputs from the far corners of the world. For this to be achieved we think there are many lessons that have already been learned, waiting to be rediscovered.

Scything Through The Noise

How Neurodiversity Finds Calm in an Ancient Practice

By

Andi Ricard

Introduction

I'm sure that all of us scythers have experienced the rhythmic and meditative qualities of using a well-honed scythe. And I'm sure many of us have noticed that there seems to be a unusually high proportion of neurospicy individuals among the scythe community.

As a long-term scythe addict who has recently discovered (at the age of 56) that I have ADHD, and some autistic traits thrown in for good measure, I thought it would be interesting to explore how scything could be beneficial to those of a neurospicy persuasion.

As a scythe teacher I've also noticed that, in recent years, I've been getting increasing numbers of neurodivergent individuals coming on my courses and they all report that they find it a wonderfully mindful and calming activity. One lady even managed to persuade her doctor to write her a prescription for scythe tuition, paid for by social services!

It is pretty well known that neurodivergent individuals (e.g., those with ADHD, autism, dyslexia, etc.) often thrive in environments that allow for focus, sensory engagement, and repetitive, satisfying tasks and scything would appear to fit the bill perfectly.

The rhythm of the blade - mindful mowing

Rhythmic, repetitive tasks can be calming and grounding for neurodivergent individuals, helping to regulate sensory input and reduce anxiety.

One of the most exhausting aspects of ADHD for me is the incessant noise in my head. I find it very difficult to focus on one thing at a time - it's like having a dozen caffeinated squirrels running around in there, constantly spotting shiny things and sending me off on side quests. It's the reason I can't mow a straight windrow to save my life.

Working with a scythe, particularly when mowing grass, is a smooth, repetitive motion. There is need to focus on the task at hand, aligning the body with the tool, which can induce a meditative state.

I find that the level of focus required quiets the dozen chattering squirrels in my head but at the same time, can allow the mind to wander freely, giving rise to creativity. If I do spot "something shiny" it's usually an iridescent beetle or a little green frog and I'm free to stop and wonder and explore.

Then there's the sound of the blade slicing through the sward - it is a sound like no other and gives instant positive feedback - and a lovely little hit of dopamine!

What2Words?

By

Suzanne Raven

One of the aspects of living a solitary life is the constant search for guidance. There hardly ever is anyone to mull things over with. No-one to discuss something with, then leave the issue rest, then revisit it at a later time.
This is not all bad. It means no-one is around to pressure me into things, to give me advice according to their vested interests, to 'make me do things'. Often enough, however, it is difficult.

When in need of guidance, I turn to dreams, signs and symbols in nature, things I read or hear. This kind of guidance is rarely as straightforward as an IKEA manual. It comes in images that can be turned this way or another way, read one way or another way. They rarely present yes/no/maybe answers. It's more that the images appeal to the smarter part of myself, the part that knows more than my conscious mind knows.
Dreams are a mighty way of accessing that smarter part of myself.
Not all dreams are equally meaningful, but every now and then one stands out. I then wake up thinking 'Remember this! There's something here that you need to know!'

Last summer, in the middle of scything season, I had a dream about… well, wait till I tell you.
It's a personal dream, and I hesitate to share it. Then again, it describes emotions that many people have and that can be hard to talk about. So, let's talk about them.

You might be expecting a scythe dream. It's not.

Here's the dream:
A young woman has a stuffed animal, a cuckoo, which she lays down beside her in her bed. She is sad and ashamed, because the cuckoo is old and threadbare and shabby. When she stays over at other young women's places, they all have new, bigger, more expensive stuffed animals. It makes me sad that the young woman is ashamed of the cuckoo. And also, that she lays it beside her instead of holding it in her arms. The cuckoo loves the young woman and would also like to be loved.
(I wake up crying.)

Most of the dream is pretty obvious and doesn't require much interpretation. If you want to use it to analyse my psyche, be my guest, but I don't recommend it.
I'd say the general guidance the dream offers is to value yourself, no matter how old, shabby and threadbare you feel when comparing yourself to others. The part of yourself that you perceive as old, shabby and threadbare is the very part that loves yourself. Do love it in turn, with all your heart.

Now, what does any of this have to do with the scythe?
I dreamt the dream during scythe season, when I was struggling with my skills and lack of skills; with my awkward body that's hardly ever at ease; with the way other scythers seem so successful in teaching their courses and running their scythe businesses. I'm thrilled that others are so successful, but I'm struggling to find my own way to success. You could say, I'm struggling to find my rhythm. Not only when I'm out in the meadow with the scythe, but also when I try to find my way in general.
This is where the cuckoo comes in.
Why did a cuckoo appear in the dream? Why not a raven? Or another bird? Or a cat, or a snake, or a wolf? When an animal appears in one of my dreams, I consult a) an encyclopaedia of traditional symbols, and b) a somewhat airy-fairy but useful book on animal symbolism.
Both agree that the cuckoo is a symbol of spring.
Yeah, obvious, you might say.
But take a moment.
Imagine a misty spring morning... You're somewhere out in nature… You're shivering in the cool air, but the day holds a promise of warm sunshine… The air is sweet with morning dew on new grass… And all of a sudden you hear the rare call of the cuckoo that reaches deep inside you and opens your heart.
Spring – a new beginning, still not sure how things will go, still figuring it all out, but already full of life that will not be held back. Like myself with the scythe.

According to the encyclopaedia of symbols, the cuckoo also symbolizes unrequited love. Going back to the dream, we can see that the cuckoo thereby reinforces the topic of the dream (not loving something that loves us; or, from the cuckoo's perspective, loving someone while not being loved). If I try to apply the message to my struggles with the scythe, I'd say the dream invites me to feel loved by all that I find difficult. My doubts; my un-easy body; my need to find my own path: all these aspects love me. I'm invited to love them in turn.

The book on animal symbolism describes how the cuckoo teaches us about the rhythm and flow of life. Aha! Remember, I was looking for rhythm! The book uses two words that appeal to me immediately. They would create a good rhythm and give good guidance, both for my use of the scythe and for finding my way.

When I next went out scything, after dreaming the dream, I kept muttering the two words to myself while mowing. The two words worked a charm, improved my performance and with it my confidence. You wonder what the two words are, don't you? Wait till I tell you what happened.

I kept scything to the rhythm of those two words for the rest of the season.
Winter came and went.
At the beginning of the new scything season, I found, to my surprise, that the two words weren't quite right any more.



Two other words swiftly replaced them. These two new words had appeared under the guidance of something other than a dream – but that's a story for another day.

I take the change of words as a sign that things have moved on. That last year's struggles might have transformed and I might be able to approach things in a different way.

Now you'd like to know what the two new words are, don't you? I won't tell you; but here's a piece of guidance: find yours!

Scythe and Spirit

By

Colin Close

It is the Millenium year and the UK is still gripped in the panic of the Millenium Bug; I myself have just moved from a tiny one bedroomed flat in the centre of the local town to (relative) luxury of what was the servants flat attached to an old country house deep in the Sussex countryside.

It was a move that was to shape much of my future life as to live in the countryside had been a deep desire since I was very young. The kitchen of the flat looked out on to an old kitchen garden lying on a steep south facing slope. It was a delight at morning breakfast to gaze out of the window and witness nature wending it's way towards summer, the grass growing and the wild flowers blooming for the whole area had gone wild after the last "live in" gardener had retired.

Alas this dream was broken when I had a call from the letting agents advising me that all that I could see from the kitchen window would need to be maintained by me. This was a major blow to my joy of living there for I had no spare money as my circumstances had been dire and it had been a real stretch to get the flat at all so I had to watch every penny. There was a third of an acre of grass and a third of an acre of old raspberry canes which had been completely invaded by bramble from the nearby hedgerow. I looked on in despair at the task.
I had a friend who lived nearby who had a largish property with lots of grass; I gave him a call as I thought he might have a mower that I could borrow. It turned out though that he used a local contractor with a gang mower but he did say that he had bought a scythe a few years previously but hadn't ever used it and that I was welcome to borrow that. Off I went to fetch it, the thing wouldn't fit in the car as it was to big and so awkward in it's "put together" shape. I dismantled it; at least I took the blade off (a really heavy thing!!) and managed to get it in the car.

My usual procrastinating self would have left it in the car for several weeks before doing anything with it but I was desperately trying to turn my life around after it's nearly complete devastation so I resolved to get on with the job no matter what it took; so the next day I took it out of the car and re-assembled it. I'm not a very tall person and. When I came to hold it the handles (yes, yes, now I know they are called nibs!) they were far too high so I tried to adjust them. I had worked out that they had screw threads that could be loosened to allow the handle to move; sadly much time was wasted until it occurred to me that they might undo in the opposite direction and so finally the handles were at least in a position where I could swing the beast. I can't remember sharpening it that day but I remembered I had a cigar stone for sharpening my kitchen knives and thought that that would probably suffice.

I must explain here that I had never witnessed a scythe being used so I had absolutely zero knowledge except that the were somehow swung. So I started swunging I tried to keep the blade flat and level at about three inches off the ground after a dozen strokes later I felt I really couldn't go on; I was blowing like a Puffing Billie!! Smoking really wasn't doing me any good.. So I tried again; it was only ten strokes this time. So I gave up for the day. I hate wasting time; we all have far too little of it. At that time I was recovering from a rather unpleasant disease which had seriously messed with my mental health. One recommendation I had had which was thought to help was to meditate but I never seemed to be able to find the time to do it. Suddenly I had a plan I would scythe for ten strokes, then rest and meditate till I had recovered a bit; then 10 strokes more. It was hard and most of the first morning was spent simply getting my breath back, meditation was out of the question! I resolved to mow every morning from 9 to 11 until it was done. I was very fortunate at

that time as I was working a consultancy contract and my working hours were very flexible.

The first week was difficult but I was making progress. As I became fitter I was spending less time getting my breath back and more time trying to meditate. I don't know about the rest of humanity but I have a very busy head there's always something going on up there. A good friend of mind refers to the issue as having a full committee of monkeys debating whatever issue is the order of the day!! Trying to meditate with this kind of stuff going on is not straightforward. Little by little though I was able to calm the noise, the exhaustion helped but somehow also I was feeling so much better. One sunny morning I breezed down to the garden to restart the task I was then about half-way through the cutting the patch and what I had first cut had already visibly recovered amd would soon need cutting again. The Forth bridge sprang to mind but somehow it didn't matter, strangely it never occurred to me at that time that I might be enjoying myself! I started mowing again and had done a bit; 10 strokes then 5 minutes trying to shut up the monkeys, ten strokes more then five minutes with the monkeys ten strokes more…. the rhythm establish itself as it had done for a couple of weeks. I'd been going at it for while and had finished the ten and had started on the five. The air smelt fresh and clean and I breathed it deeply, the sun was warm on my back soothing my sinews, my hearing sharpened, the smell of cut grass assaulted my nostrils as the fullness of nature filled me. The monkeys had fled and as I sat in that clarity I knew peace; a commodity so rare in my life. This was the time that my relationship with the scythe was formed. I have never forgotten this wonderful experience and each time I mow for any length of time I seek that place. I don't always find it but when I do I know I am experiencing some of the best this world can offer.



Postscript:
While writing this short piece I began to wonder what had happened to my friends scythe so I contacted him (He lives in France now). It turned out that he still had it and he offered to give it to me. I asked whether it had been used since I had done those many years ago. He said it had not been touched as he had a ride on mower so I asked for a picture.

I think one look from you, The Windrow readers will confirm that I knew absolutely nothing about scything!! The reverse hafting angle is particularly revealing!!!! Interestingly the scythe seems to be an unusual one as being fairly English is design but with a straighter snath.
Earlier in this piece I mentioned my desire to live in the countryside, there is a picture which alas I cannot find of my sister (3yrs) and myself (5yrs) sitting atop a horsedrawn haywain led by a man in his sixties complete with floppy hat and chewing a stem of grass taken on a holiday with my parents in Norfolk where I had an uncle who was a piano and antique restorer. Snippets of that holiday are a lasting memory; it was in another time and another place but just perhaps the hay in the picture and the scythe in my hand just somehow went together.



You may ask..Why is this picture here. To honest the main reason is that there is a big white space that needed to be filled. However there is a more subtle reason for it's presence. The picture is of a scything competition in the Gronigen region of the Netherlands. The observent among you will notice that the furthest scyther in the picture is using a metal snath. When I had to return the scythe to my friend John Idid not know about the Austrian scythe so I foolishly bought an identical one to that in the picture. I still have it in fact! It was an evil thing! In the end I removed the top handle completely. Eventually I split the blade cutting bramble. It was then that I discovered the Austrian scythe.

Chiselborough Common
by
Larry Levanthal

Chiselborough is a small ham stone village in South Somerset just over a mile south of Ham Hill. The village benefits from a four acre common that is owned by the Parish Council. Over the years, management of the Common has proven difficult for a number of reasons. The Common borders onto housing, has a road running through the middle and has no water supply – all factors that mean grazing by livestock is not a viable mechanism to manage the common as a whole. In addition, the land also slopes very steeply making grass cutting using machinery difficult and expensive. Previous attempts at mechanical cutting have resulted in an overturned tractor! The result is that much of the Common became dominated by meter tall grass and gradual colonisation by bramble and trees.



On a more positive side, the Common has high value for wildlife including rare glow-worms and foraging barn owls. The Common has great views and and is used by people with an annual 'village picnic' and regular use of the picnic benches and seating areas.





To enhance the positives, there is a now a clear plan that aims to improve the site for wildlife and provide much better access for people. In the past year, a partnership has been established with the Bumblebee Conservation Trust to provide improved habitat for the endangered Shrill Carder Bee which is now restricted to a few colonies in Kent and South Somerset in England having once been a very widespread bee.

Scything has been the key to improving the achievement of these aims. Around 30 local people are now signed up to the 'Common Scythers' WhatsApp group and at least 10 are capable scythers following expert training provided by Larry Leventhal.

The group meets on the last Saturday each month and undertakes regular cutting of the informal recreation and picnic area; two or three cuts a year to the road verge, and annual cuts in areas set aside as newly established wildflower meadows. Other areas are left uncut to provide nesting habitat and hibernation sites amongst the grass tussocks with occasional work to reduce the spread of brambles and bracken.

The result has been considerable progress over the past three years as the regular management has had an impact. We have had a number of problems to overcome including the disposal of the cut grass! Unfortunately, there is no local demand for the cut hay and the problem with scattered grass piles across the common is that the enriched sites are quickly colonised by nettles and brambles. After experimenting with offsite disposal by the local farmer, we have now identified three discrete composting areas on the common to contain the grass and provide some useful habitat for slowworms and other wildlife.

We can now look forward with much more confidence as the Common has been transformed from an overwhelming problem to a managed asset. The rewards that flow from engaging in the task of scything and the joy of working with a developing group of friends from the local community are of huge value. Many newcomers to the village have got involved and met neighbours by joining in the range of tasks whi8ch has certainly reinforced the reputation of Chiselborough as one of the friendliest villages in Somerset.

YOU WON'T SEE THIS AT CRUFTS

by

Peter Totman

I obtained this scythe as a Cornishman's gift: "I don't want it, you can have it". A few days later I picked it up. The scythe had been brought some years ago, possibly at a car boot sale by the donor's late father for use on his allotment. Where it came from, heaven knows, but my goodness, what a mongrel. It all came about when out of the blue my wife had a call from a family friend. "I have my Dad's old scythe, I can't get on with it; too much like hard work, would Peter like it?" How could I resist?



I was not expecting anything special and I was not disappointed. I was handed an aluminium English style snath that seemed incredibly short compared to my Austrian size 3, and a thickly painted, (complete with cat hairs), incredibly heavy, very old Sheffield-stamped blade with a squared off end. After polite thank you's and the usual pleasantries I walked back to the car thinking this will go straight to the recycling centre.

However, on getting home, my parsimonious nature got the better of me and I thought I'll just put it together and give it a go before I dump it. It was horrible. The snath must have been made for someone less than 5 feet tall, and the blade, compared to my beautifully finished Austrian ones was an absolute dog, badly made and incredibly heavy. No wonder, I thought to myself, the British industry died out. But by then I couldn't be defeated.

I started with the blade which consisted of a 'flat' steel knife riveted to an iron chine. The first thing I did was to take tinsnips to the squared end to form a smooth curve. Not having a cigar stone I used my synthetic coarse canoe stone to form some sort of cutting bevel. And there I hit the second snag. The rivets holding the chine to the blade stood proud on both sides of the blade which meant the stone kept snagging on them while attempting to hone the edge. So it was out with the heavy hammer and a bit of brutal bashing to swage the rivets almost flush with the surface of the metal. Then it was on with the sharpening. After ten minutes or so I had something like an edge.



I put the whole thing together again and gave it a second try. It had been transformed, and actually cut quite well: I was almost Impressed: apart from being bent double by the badly positioned grips. It was time to tackle the snath.

The nib fixings were a very tight rusty grip on the aluminium shaft. I could see the nuts on the ends of the nibs but no amount of 3-In-One would get the nuts to undo…until, in desperation I tried twisting the 'wrong' way: they unscrewed. The iron work inside the grip was like a large, threaded split pin welded at

the threaded end. The ironwork seems to have been made from round bar, roughly ground semicircular, bent to shape, spot welded and threaded. It had been very crudely done and I was wary about breaking it if I was too enthusiastic in my fettling. By the look of it, the nibs were not meant to be adjustable and it took a bit of careful levering with a cold chisel to loosen the grip of the ring enough to enable the nibs to be moved to positions suitable for me, this involved a fair amount of waggling and the gentle help of a lump hammer.



Reassembling the scythe, I gave it another go on the lawn. My Goodness, what a difference, it actually cut quite well. The blade is distorted slightly, rather than being flat it's as bent as a dog's hind leg. The passage of time has not been kind. But I finished mowing the grass with a smile on my face, remembering the old saying… You tell a happy scyther by the flies in their teeth.

With the glow of satisfaction that comes from a job well jobbed, I fired up the old Mackintosh to see what I could find about the oddly paired items I had acquired.

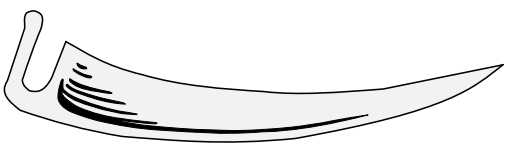
The blade is stamped 'TYZACK TURNER SHEFFIELD'. William Tyzack was a long established agricultural component firm based around Abbey Dale Forge in Sheffield and joined by Turner in 1876. They produced scythes, as far as I can tell, up to about 1961. After a deal more scrubbing with a Garryson block and wet and dry, I found the elephant trademark confirming my blade to be one of their products. An image search on line found some examples of their scythe blades, mine seems peculiar in having two grass nail holes. I was surprised by the crudeness of the blade's construction which leads me to wonder if it had been a war-time product, flung together from a soft iron chine and soft steel for the blade, the proud rivets being left for the purchaser to swag flat. it certainly does not have the finish of the internet examples.



At the same time I searched for the snath's maker, a firm called Seymour. Nothing to do with John but an American manufacturer, now called Seymour Midwest, hailing from Warsaw, Indiana. They still make snaths and one can be yours for $130.00 plus shipping. Oh yes, on their website it does mention that the grips are reverse threaded. If I'd looked first I could have saved vital seconds. Ah, fools rush in. I couldn't find an outlet in the UK, so how and when it got to Britain will remain a mystery. The reviews on the internet for the most part were not very enthusiastic.

I have never used an English-style snath before, or for that matter a metal snath. The combination of heavy blade and light snath was a little disconcerting at first, the balance felt all wrong. Once I got used to it the scythe worked very well on lawn grass and I am looking forward to trying it out on some Cornish meadow, which, after all, was what the English scythe evolved to cut. The upright, more relaxed style of mowing took a little getting used to, being more familiar with the 'leaning in' stance of the central European setup.

So there's the tale of the mongrel scythe, and ancient Limey blade paired with an upstart Yankee snath, another aspect of a special relationship with a chequered history. But it works.



Himalayan Balsam

Control With A Scythe

by

Richard Brown



Himalayan balsam (Impatiens glandulifera) was introduced into Britain from the Himalayas in 1839 as it is quite an impressive and attractive plant. It is now an invasive weed of riverbanks and ditches where it is regarded as a problem weed as it prevents native species from growing in summer and dies away in winter leaving bare soil vulnerable to erosion.
Himalayan Balsam is an annual plant. It germinates in early spring. It is very fast-growing, potentially reaching over 2 meters in height by June. It can out-compete most native plants (even nettles!)
It flowers and sets seed prolifically from July to October. Its explosive seed pods aid its dispersal by sending the seeds into the river, causing further spread downstream. Most seeds overwinter before germinating the following spring. There is some evidence of some seeds remaining un-germinated as a persistent seedbank lasting for at least 2 -3 years.

Control Strategies

As an annual plant the main aim of any control program will be to stop any balsam plants completing their life cycle and setting any seed to perpetuate the problem or allow it to spread.
The three main approaches to removing Himalayan balsam are: chemical, hand pulling (uprooting) and cutting.
Only the latter (naturally using scythes), is under consideration here!

In 2024 I was asked to participate in a project to demonstrate the efficacy of Balsam control using scythes with volunteers along sections of the Wreake river Valley in Leicestershire. This was part of a DEFRA funded 'Invasives to Natives' INNS project run by Leicester County Council. I was engaged to provide advice, equipment and training for volunteers and students at Brooksby College.

We targeted sections of river bank on two separate occasions spaced a month apart in May and in June to assess the difference the timing of cut had. Each cut area was followed up over ensuing weeks to assess the results and deal with any recovery (as any plant that managed to regrow and shed seed would undo all the good work).

Whilst I have given advice on Balsam control a



By late June it's over 2m in height (my scythe is 1.6m)

number of times over the years, this was my first 'hands on' experience mowing balsam. It is great fun! The succulent hollow stems of these impressive plants yield so easily to the scythe even when fully grown -most satisfying! Landing the two-meter giants neatly to ones left is slightly trickier, especially if entangled with stinging nettles!

I started out with a standard 65cm Styria ditch blade but quickly stepped up a few gears to use my longer



Myself mowing Balsam on 24th May

90cm 'munching' blade with a fairly deep (but not heavy) body. I normally use this for quickly munching through succulent nettle and hogweed stands. I can set it up with a fairly wide hafting angle if the mowing is easy, and I have fitted a grass nail to stop tall nettle stems getting caught in the elbow by the beard.



The students all did well with 65 ditch blades, especially given the uneven terrain. Their college lecturer confessed that he had had a long career teaching horticulture and land management with grass cutting machinery, but had never thought to try a scythe before. His comment after using my scythes as a novice himself was "I thought the scythes with the 65cm blades were pretty impressive, until I had a go with the 90cm beast which was truly amazing!"

Conclusions from the Balsam Control Project

Scything works!

The use of scythes as part of a programme of Himalayan Balsam management appears to be 90%-95% effective.

Although hand-pulling may be more than 95% effective, even inexperienced mowers with basic training can cover a lot more ground with a scythe.

The more inaccessible areas of growth, on steep riverbanks and boggy woodland for example, can be reached with a scythe more quickly than attempting hand-pulling, and more safely than using mechanical brush cutters.

Timing

Balsam cutting can be effective from May until just before the first potential seed set in late June. (Earlier cutting is said to promote bushy regrowth with potentially more flowers and seed production than uncut stands, so was not tested).

Scythes can tackle plants of all sizes, but it is more efficient to cut when the plants are still around 500mm to 1000mm tall. This means that stalks are robust enough to respond well to the scythe, but also reduces the overall amount of cut foliage produced. In practice however, except in small target areas, a control work programme will need to keep cutting throughout the short period of growth ahead of seeding.

Aftermath

Leaving cut Balsam where it falls, spread out and exposed to direct sunlight, withers quickly and dies with little or no chance of the cuttings rooting. This avoids the arduous task of raking off and issues of disposal (as it becomes controlled waste if taken off site).





Balsam doesn't like dry conditions. The exposed soil surface after cutting dries out quickly and so becomes less hospitable to fresh germination and regrowth.
As the balsam plants are no longer providing their own shade protection for roots, the rooted cut stumps also mainly die. Plants that were successfully severed below the first stem node were certain to die.
Even where the stems were cut above the first shoot node, (as result of uneven terrain (river dredging spoil heaps), obstructing debris (twigs and branches from trees) and newly trained volunteers) a 95% success rate was still observed.

With minimal recovery it is very quick and easy to revisit a previously cut site to pick off any regrowth, new growth or missed plants.
Pulled Balsam plants with roots attached by comparison have the potential for re-rooting if roots are covered, lay on a damp surface, or are piled into damp heaps. (removal offsite is generally not an option for reason of biosecurity).
On some sites removal of the shading from the growth-suppressing balsam canopy allowed recovery of lower growing native perennial herbs and grasses. This healthy perennial ground cover will help suppress balsam germination in following years.

Control Program Planning

The size of the area that can be tackled with scythes will be limited by the number of available trained scythe volunteers.

This scheme had 10 kilometres of river banks: more than could be tackled in one season with a cutting window of only six to eight weeks before seed set.
It is important to start up river and eliminate balsam here first to avoid reinfection from balsam stands still growing upstream and sending fresh seeds down stream.

Control sites need monitoring to mop up survivors both in the weeks after cutting, but also in following few years as seed may persist in the soil to re-emerge for 2 -3 years or more.

With thanks to Phil Whetter (Scyther) for his support on the courses, monitoring and feedback on the project, and for his report which formed the basis of this post. Also Roseanna Burton from Leicester County Council who coordinated the project and Alex Gray at Brooksby College.



A LEADING LIGHT

PETER VIDO

June 10th 1950 – June 23rd 2018

