

Why I Volunteer with Knighton Community Woodlands Group

We asked our volunteers to let us know why they volunteer with us. As you will see, there is a great variety of reasons, including environmental, social, educational, health and wellbeing, and - in one case - feline...

If you are interested in joining us, details are at the end of the articles.

Chris is a volunteer and qualified chainsaw operator, who also helps run our training courses.



I volunteer when I can, mostly helping out with the tree felling. From my previous experience as a ranger I've gained quite a good understanding of woodland management techniques, but a change in job role means I don't get the chance to use the skills as much as I'd like. Volunteering with the Woodlanders gives me the opportunity to use these skills and socialise with a group of like-minded people. It's also just great fun chopping down trees, especially when it's to help improve the quality of a woodland. The added bonus of having access to some extra firewood each year is even better!

Everyone is very friendly and welcoming, and there's a very relaxed atmosphere while we work, even in the rain and snow! I've not been out much recently due to the birth of my second child, but I'm looking forward to getting back to it soon, and I know that when I do everyone will be pleased to see me and we'll catch up on everything I've missed.

Nicola has been with the Woodlanders since 2014 and is a regular at the woodland task days.

"When I got to Knighton as a retiree, I wanted to do something which connected me to the wonderful landscape in the area. I was a townie but over the years have discovered the importance of being in woods and countryside. Nature and fresh air is invigorating and good for my mental health! Knighton Community Woodlands Group has taken me to a variety of beautiful local woods in private hands which certainly fits the bill. I see places many do not have the opportunity to visit. What has also been a joy is meeting men and women who are now friends. A more convivial and sociable group you could not come across and we have been known to meet socially away from the demands of the woodland tasks.

The tasks rotate on an annual basis and include moving cordwood (cut tree trunks). This is physical and creates a great outdoor gym experience. A chainsaw is used to cut the trees down and to cut the cordwood into logs. I don't use a chainsaw, but several members of the group have been trained to industry-recognised standards. Training is given on the use of all tools. I love the learning about woodland management and the heritage we have. I hope I am getting better at splitting the logs with an axe, building the stores and stacking. We make some woodland products and plant, coppice and maintain new trees too. I now do some administrative tasks and my van has been used to transport people and equipment. There are so many opportunities for members to be involved and 'bank' work hours to be finally rewarded in access to firewood! Then of course there is enormous pleasure in burning logs that all of us have been involved in creating. Local sustainable production, increasing diversity and managing woods for the future are great organisational goals which I love being part of."



A founding member, Colin has probably attended more task days than anyone else.



Back in 2010, I met a group of local residents who, like me, were concerned about the number of woodlands falling into neglect, or that trees were treated just like a cash crop and whole swathes of them were clearfelled, devastating the habitats of the species that used to live there. As a result, Knighton Tree Allotments Trust (now known as Knighton Community Woodlands Group) was created and this was my opportunity to help bring some woodlands back into sustainable management whilst improving biodiversity. I have thoroughly enjoyed seeing the group grow in those ten years, have visited and worked in a variety of woodlands, attended various training courses, developed new skills, helped in the creation of woodland products and enjoyed meeting and working with the other volunteers and woodland owners.

For more years than I care to remember, I have always enjoyed being involved in practical conservation. Whilst in employment, the experience of working out in the fresh air and benefitting from the exercise was a happy escape from sitting by a computer screen in an office. Now retired, trying to keep fit and meeting others is even more essential and volunteering with KCWG helps towards meeting those needs. Most of us lead busy lives and it's nice to know that no regular commitment is required. You can do as much or as little as you like ... and the big bonus is on those cold, winter evenings as the fruits of all our labours repays our efforts. As the old saying goes, wood warms you three times - when you cut it, when you split it, and when you burn it and to that I would like to add the warm feeling you get when you know you've done something positive for nature.

Annie is a Trustee of Knighton Community Woodlands Group and a woodlands Volunteer.

I try and volunteer with the Woodlanders at least twice monthly. Being out in the woods is a great departure from my day job, but one I fully appreciate and relish when so very close to nature. Working in woodland allows me to gain knowledge and experiences regularly, and affords me the chance to be with people who are so experienced in woodland management, bio-diversity and the natural world - which is a huge bonus in itself.

I appreciate what being in such wonderful surroundings offers my physical and emotional wellbeing. Scientific research commissioned by the Royal Horticultural Society has demonstrated that there are so many therapeutic benefits to spending time outside close to nature, particularly in a group setting. I can't help having a smile on my face when out in the woodland, surrounded by beautiful trees, listening to an amazing soundscape of bird song and having close contact to wildlife.

Volunteering for the Woodlanders can involve hard manual work, but that allows me to feel challenged, proud and accomplished. There is great pleasure working within a small like-minded team, especially when we are all working towards the same goals. There is also a great sense of achievement in the winter months when you know the log you are putting on your wood burner has possibly come from something you have done on a task day.



Guy's Tale (or Guy's "Tail" ...)

Hi Fellow Woodlanders – my name is Guy and I am a woodlandoholic. I am here this evening with the Knighton Woodlanders' Anonymous Group to tell a sad tale of how and why I was driven into woodlandering. Be warned, this is a tale of absolute corruption, mindless contentment and the savagery that is log burning.

My life was ruined by the powers that a heartless, unfeeling brute of a pet cat called Millie has over me. Ever since she was just a kitten, she actively sought out warmth and heat so that she could stretch out luxuriously in front of it. It started easily enough with little touches like radiators and sunlit patches on the lounge carpet. But these were just the beginnings of a very slippery slope that had been started by innocently taking the simplest of life's pleasures through enjoying such little moments.



The years rolled by and the cat's grip got stronger and stronger. The relentless emotional pressures and rapidly escalating financial costs to secure greater and longer exposures to warmth created a continuous need that rapidly became an addiction. In the end, the Cat-From-Hell demanded the biggest log burner made in Shropshire be installed with her own, speciality cushion directly in front of it – as you can see in the picture.

Now my life of utter misery continues as I am forced to collect environmentally acceptable logs via KCWG to keep the ever-hungry burner lit and the cat in sweet contentment. Like most fools, I thought I could control it but now it controls me. Heed my words of warning: it's so much easier if you never start log burning for your pet!

Rebecca joined us in 2017 and has become very adept in timber extraction.

I had never been involved in anything to do with woodlands before, beyond enjoying walking in them, listening to the bird song and relaxing. I joined the group after seeing an information stall and chatting to one of the volunteers. We have a wood burner at home which provides most of our heat in the winter and I really liked the idea of knowing where our fire wood comes from and contributing, physically, to its production.

Once I'd joined and actually started volunteering in the woods, I discovered many more benefits. Being in the woods and not just walking through them you notice so many things, like the fungi on the logs you're carrying; what's going on in the rotting tree stumps; the way the new leaves creep out of the buds. I do a lot of hill walking so my legs are fairly strong but I knew as I got older I would need to do something to keep my upper body fit and healthy. I had been contemplating gym membership even though I'm not keen on exercising indoors – I'm not contemplating gym membership anymore!



I love the banter and chat that comes with working with the other woodlanders, and loads of interesting stories from people who have worked in woodlands as a career. I have learnt such a lot. There are lots of courses offered on woodland management, chainsaw operating and other woodland related topics. I haven't done any yet, as I have little spare time at the moment, but I know there's lots of ways to learn if I want to and have time in the future.

Volunteering from a few months after the Group was formed in 2010, Gary volunteers and co-ordinates the task days when we work in the woods.



I've always loved trees and woodlands. Being a volunteer with the Woodlanders means that I can now interact with woods and well as admire them. Trees have provided us with shelter, fuel, timber and other resources for generations and I am keen to continue that tradition. My great-grandfather was a coppice-worker, and my father and uncle told me stories of them helping him to point 'spiles' – small wooden stakes. I like to think that great-grandfather Ernest would appreciate what we do as a group. I've learnt an awful lot of skills over 10 years with the Woodlanders and yet I know I'm still only a beginner.

My motivation is the sustainable woodland products we grow and harvest, always working with nature and to the benefit of the woodland wildlife. The cyclical nature of what we do makes me think of how my firewood for 10 years' time is growing right now from the coppice stool I cut last year. Volunteering with the Woodlanders

means I get to spend time outdoors, get good exercise and spend time with other people – always good when you work from home!"

Mark is one of our most regular volunteers since joining in 2016 and is also our Treasurer.

I moved to the Welsh borders from Sussex, where I volunteered with the Woodland Trust, coppicing in a local hazel wood. The Woodlanders has given me the opportunity to continue with woodland conservation work whilst meeting new people and getting to know the area around my new home.

During my time with the Woodlanders, I have made new friends, discovered many areas of the spectacular mid-Wales countryside and learnt a great deal about woodlands. Knighton Community Woodland Group is not just about managing a wood for its products. Over the years they have organised a number of courses from Identifying Ancient Woodland Plants to hedge laying.

On the Identifying Ancient Woodland Plants course, we spent a day wandering through a woodland with an expert. We looked for plants that can indicate that the wood is an ancient woodland – in other words continuously wooded since 1600. Even after trees have been cut down, some woodland plants linger on and provide an indication that the area could be brought back to native species woodland. Why were the trees cut down in the first place? In centuries gone by it was to build sailing ships and more recently to make way for conifer plantations.



Brenda started volunteering with the Woodlanders after attending our *Introduction to Woodland Management* training course in January 2019.

"I'm thankful for the opportunity to volunteer with groups working to manage woodlands and promote biodiversity. I volunteer with three different groups, one of which meets from October to March only.

I'm a member of the Small Woods Association because I value the work they do, sadly not because I own a small wood. I know that it's extremely unlikely that I will ever own even a share in a wood. I value trees and love being in woodlands. I'm fortunate enough to have several pieces of woodland immediately around me where I can walk most days. But being able to work in woodlands by volunteering means I can learn and practice some of the skills needed to benefit the balance of the woods. Sometimes I get to visit woods that would otherwise not be accessible to me. I value the peace and quiet found in woodlands, so you can guess that I don't enjoy the sound of chainsaws, but I know they're a necessary part of the work.



Much of John Muir's writing means a great deal to me, but I feel this one is apt:

'In to the forest I go to lose my mind and find my soul'.

If you'd like to know more about volunteering, please email woodland@tveg.org.uk
or telephone: 01547 520374.

Our website has information about the us and our volunteering opportunities:
<http://tveg.org.uk/wordpress/what-we-do/woodland-project>