

wwoof uk news

world wide opportunities on organic farms

issue 228

autumn 2010



gathering stories

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feedback system - we want your views!

www.wwoof.org.uk

editorial

Welcome to the Autumn edition of the **Wwoof UK** newsletter - and welcome too, to all new members and host farms who have joined over the past few months.

In this issue we've got some fantastic stories about Wwoofing both here at home and further afield - Christian Cummins' tales of olive picking in Italy are certainly my kind of armchair travelling.

On pages 4&5 Oliver Handscomb suggests some great ways of getting together with others for Wwoofing as a group - harking back to Sue Coppard's original vision for Wwoof.

Don't miss the info about the Autumn gathering and AGM on page 9, you won't want to miss the amazing storytelling session being hosted by Wwoof stalwarts Edward Acland and Carl Rogers. Book now and bring your own stories to share!

Happy harvesting,

Alissa Pemberton, Editor

write to us!

We're looking for interesting host features, Wwoofing stories, your letters, international news, Transition Initiatives news from food and farming groups, seasonal stories – recipes, customs, food storage, book reviews and, of course, your classified ads.

Please send contributions to editor@Wwoof.org.uk or by post to the office, by the following dates:

31st Oct for Winter 10 issue

31st Jan for Spring 11 issue

30th April for Summer 11 issue

31st July for Autumn 11 issue

Please note the classified advert payment rates - see page 11 for more details.

Don't forget you can always post adverts, questions and comments on the forum at www.lowimpact.org

what is Wwoof UK?

Wwoof UK holds a list of organic farms, gardens and smallholdings, all offering food and accommodation in exchange for practical help on their land. These hosts range from a low impact woodland settlement to a 600 hectare mixed holding with on-site farm shop, cafe and education centre. Hosts do not expect you to know a lot about farming when you arrive, but they do expect you to be willing to learn and able to fit in with their lifestyle.

The list of hosts is available by joining Wwoof UK for a membership fee. Once you have the list you can contact hosts directly to arrange your stay. Your host will explain what kind of work you will be expected to do, what accommodation is on offer and will discuss the length of your stay.

Wwoof is a charity; Wwoofers do not pay to stay with hosts and hosts do not pay Wwoofers for their help. Charity number: 1126220

Wwoof UK is administered by LILI - the Low Impact Living Initiative. www.lowimpact.org

Send us your pics!

We want give people an idea of what Wwoofing in the UK is like by showing them all the different ways in which people are Wwoofing. So we need your photos for the website please!

Please make sure that you get the permission of the hosts and Wwoofers in the photos.

Photos can be emailed to michaelmcandrew@Wwoof.org

The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily represent those held by Wwoof or LILI

news from the office

Feedback - is it the way forward?

Main office are seeing more and more requests to provide a facility where WWOOFers and hosts can leave comments and feedback about each other. This is because other organisations such as HelpX operate similar systems and we are told it works well.

WWOOF Council have shied away from these sorts of rating systems in the past for a couple of reasons. Primarily, we didn't feel it was a very 'WWOOFy' thing to do and it didn't reflect what our membership wanted. Secondly, some hosts said they didn't want their lives and livelihoods to be critiqued in this way and they would stop being hosts if we brought in this kind of system. However, it has been a while since we've broached this subject, times have changed, and a number of other WWOOF organisations (WWOOF Independents, Sweden and Ireland for example) have started using feedback systems. From some of the threads on the UK forum, it certainly seems like an idea gaining in popularity from both volunteers and hosts. In fact, not one single person on the forum has said they don't want the feedback system. But does that reflect what YOU think..?

Now is your big chance to speak out! Do you, our membership, want us to give you a feedback system? If so, what form should it take? How should we deal with negative comments and 'clash of personality' scenarios? Is there a pre-existing model you think we should follow? If you don't think we should have a feedback system, why not?

Please, please take the time to send us your thoughts on this issue. It's only through listening to your responses that we will be able to help WWOOF UK be the organisation you want it to be. All comments can be sent to scarlett.penn@wwoof.org.uk or sent by post to the main office address.

Forum

The forum is proving very popular, but we ask you not use it as a way to share negative experiences or grievances against volunteers or hosts. WWOOF UK has a complaints procedure and has always been committed to removing any member - hosts or volunteer - who is not fitting into the WWOOF ethic. But we can only act if we receive a complaint directly from the person who had the experience; we cannot act from a post on the forum. So these comments do not serve any constructive purpose and can give a very negative impression of WWOOFing - which is a shame, because WWOOF is a force for good in this world!

Membership news

There has been a change to the way WWOOF UK membership works. In the past, when volunteers have joined or renewed they have been posted a membership card, a copy of the latest newsletter and a sheet containing some basic WWOOFing guidelines. From now on, the email a WWOOFer receives when they join or renew will contain the five-digit membership number and a link to the newsletters stored online. The WWOOF guidelines will also be posted online. There will be no physical membership pack arriving by post unless you have joined as a book member.

WWOOFers: Now, when you contact a host, you should quote your five-digit membership number. The host can check this number and make sure you are a current WWOOFer before confirming they will accept you.

Hosts: Log in with your username and password, then look down the left hand side where you will see 'check status' underneath the heading 'WWOOF ID check'. Enter your potential WWOOFer's five-digit membership number in the box and hit 'apply'. This will return your WWOOFer's name and their membership status. If it is out of date, it will say 'expired'. Soon it will also tell you whether a membership is a joint membership (for two people) or an individual membership.

Election of Directors

At the AGM in October, Richard Hazell, Emma Goodwin and Michael McAndrew will be standing again for election as directors of WWOOF. Here are details of two other candidates who would be interested in becoming directors in future:

Andy Wright : Being a WWOOF volunteer has already given me a lifetime's worth of incredible opportunities to love, appreciate and learn about the land. Now I want to harness that energy along with my IT skills to help promote WWOOF and get more people involved so they can learn and re-skill for the future.

Erica Berzagli: I believe and am actively researching WWOOF as a way to achieve Sustainable Development and a herald for Intercultural Communication. Nature, exchange, ideas, lifestyle, communication, soil, trust, ecology, farms, learning, sheep, adventure, community, diversity, patience - these elements make WWOOF great and I want to be part of it.

If you are interested in finding out more about the role, please contact richard.hazell@wwoof.org

Follow us on <http://twitter.com/WWOOFUK>
and tweet about your WWOOFing experiences!
Share the love of WWOOF with other tweeters!

Joining up the dots in the

With the help from the WWOOF team several group WWOOF events have been arranged throughout the South West over the summer. The idea was to help out hosts who'd like a group of WWOOFers to come at one time to undertake specific projects. Helping out as part of a group can also appeal to WWOOFers too. The group provides support and extra opportunities for sharing knowledge and experience. It is a simple idea of just joining up the dots of needs and interests much as WWOOF helps facilitate already.

Sometimes these WWOOFing groups can naturally form, especially at the more popular hosts who frequently have WWOOFers already. Sometimes however I think it can be useful for all involved to arrange an event beforehand. In this way numbers of people, tools and other resources can be matched up for completing some tasks which might not get started without the group energy impetus.

Group volunteer events can also be used as a way to encourage more organic farms to join up to be WWOOF hosts and also spread the word about WWOOFing in wider circles. I have helped organise some group volunteer events "in the spirit of WWOOF" with a local organic farm in Somerset, and they are now interested in becoming WWOOF hosts themselves. The hosts could see these events as both enjoyable as well as beneficial in furthering their own local community contacts which could benefit the business as well. This approach has also been useful to help spread the word about WWOOFing and provide advice about where to start if there is interest to give it a try.

Group WWOOF events have the potential to create further connections within the local community near the WWOOF host. This can be achieved through using existing community organisations and networks and publicising group volunteer events with a local host. These community connections can benefit the host, WWOOFers as well as encourage greater support for the WWOOF organisation and fulfilment of its aims and ethos.

Organising group WWOOFs yourself

There are only so many group WWOOFs one person can organise and take part in, so I'd encourage anyone else interested to get one together too. If everyone does that, making links in their local region along the way with other community groups, that's a lot of beneficial connections created. As they often say in Permaculture those connecting strands create a strong and resilient web.

There are many accessible ways we can go about publicising group WWOOF events to make them happen and making use of readily available tools and networks that already exist. The WWOOF

forum hosted by LILI (Low Impact Living Initiative) and accessed via the WWOOF website provides the opportunity for both hosts and WWOOFers to post messages and get some group events organised. Similarly the WWOOF team may also be able to update the blog with future planned events as well as celebrate those that have already taken place.

The local Transition Town group where I live has also proven an effective way to publicise group volunteer opportunities. There is much emphasis in the Transition Town movement about "re-skilling." Learning how to grow your own food is one aspect of that. Supporting the development of a strong local economy and helping locally based food producers is also often important to the work of local transition groups. These are also both elements WWOOF has long championed and helps facilitate, so the two organisations do go together well.

By linking with local community organisations such as Transition Town groups, there is the potential to have a wide range of people take part in these group WWOOFs. Some may live locally and others may travel from further a-field. One of the benefits of WWOOFing in general is I think that it gives you an opportunity to get to know a community and area in a way which is often not possible as a more conventional sight-seeing tourist. By inviting people active in local community organisations such as Transition Town groups, there is all the more opportunity for those new to an area to learn more about local projects, activities and issues. These may all turn into valuable ideas and experiences to take back to your own home community.

Other local community networks which may prove useful ways of publicising group volunteer events could be with LETS groups (Local Exchange Trading Schemes). Some of these may already hold work parties periodically at member's gardens and small holdings for example. They may also be interested in spreading the word about a local opportunity to help on an organic farm. Our local LETS group has a yahoo group so that a range of events and activities can be publicised with other members.

Spreading the word about such group volunteer events also provides a great way to spread the word about WWOOF in general and encourage more people to join the organisation too. I know that there are certainly people in my area who have joined WWOOF since hearing about local events.

So I feel that if you are interested in doing some WWOOFing as part of a group, there are plenty of simple ways it can be made to happen. I think as WWOOFers we can take the responsibility to help organise some group WWOOF events with hosts

Wwoof web of connections

where such an event is going to be appreciated.

Some hosts already organise group Wwoof events themselves. One example would be the great fun and well attended work weekends held at Lower Shaw Farm through the year each month (with a brief break in the summer!) I would encourage more hosts to think about arranging their own group Wwoof events, if you find it might be a useful way to gather some assistance at different times of the year or for specific projects. I appreciate that it may be a balance to strike over the time commitments involved in establishing and the potential benefits, but you might find it works out for you. And once community contacts are made perhaps with local organisations as mentioned, and you get into the routine of organising and running Wwoof events, you might find it isn't a problem anyway.

So I think group Wwoofing of one sort or another can prove useful for both Wwoofers and hosts in some situations. And I think there's plenty of ways that the idea can be taken forward and adapted and developed further. I know for example many people already enjoy combining cycle touring and Wwoofing. A group bike or walking tour could also be shaped up linking a series of Wwoof hosts. This could be of varying lengths depending on preferences, or a whole series throughout the country to which you join for the entire trip or for regional legs.

Group Wwoofing and Permaculture

Group Wwoofing can also be linked usefully to furthering your own learning and experience of Permaculture and in particular gaining further experience beyond the Permaculture design course. Having completed a design course earlier in the year I am keen to further apply this knowledge and experience. Visiting new Wwoof places gives you a great opportunity to apply the much emphasised principle of observation. Walking your way through what you see and what this could mean for potential designs in each place is a good way to practice a range of design skills.

I am aware that taking the next steps after completing a Permaculture design course can prove daunting and that some further assistance and guidance can be useful in the application of skills already learnt in your own designs whether in a garden or another aspect in your life. The Permaculture diploma can provide that further support and it does seem to be a recommended next step.

In addition there could be value in joining up hosts for example who would like to create and start initiating a design at their site (whether a garden, smallholding or farm) with Wwoofers with

Permaculture design skills and experience who would like to apply those alongside a Wwoof host. The group therefore provides guidance support and ideas for getting a Permaculture design together for a Wwoof host, and Wwoofers taking part get to practice their design work. Completing the design work as part of a Wwoof group can create a mutually supportive environment. Also this group environment can help foster imaginative and creative thinking with many pairs of eyes and different ideas to add to the design process.

So if there are any Wwoofers or hosts with an interest in Permaculture who feels this might also be an idea to explore further, please get in contact.

I'd also be interested to hear any thoughts you might have on group Wwoofing in general and how it might be further worked out. And I'm happy to help in any way I can if you're interested in organising some yourself.

Oliver Handscomb - darn_nemo@hotmail.com

There is a series of group Wwoof dates planned in October so please get in contact with me if you'd like to book a place or would like further information. Numbers are limited and booking needed.

- 4th-15th October: Steward Community Woodland, near Mortenhampstead, edge of Dartmoor National Park. Camping required and bringing own tent. People are welcome to come for one or two weeks, working Monday to Friday with weekends free.

Further Resources:

- Please see the Permaculture Association's website www.Permaculture.org.uk/ for more information about Permaculture).
- See the Wwoof website for links to the Wwoof forum and blog www.Wwoof.org.uk/
- See the Transition Towns website for further information about the network and to locate your local group <http://transitiontowns.org/TransitionNetwork/TransitionInitiative>

**what do you think?
send us your thoughts
and ideas!**

**email: editor@Wwoof.org.uk
Wwoof UK, P.O. Box 2154,
Winslow, Bucks, MK18 3WS**

la dolce vita in italia

Christian Cummins leaves his desk job in Vienna and heads across the Alps to enjoy the beauty and sunshine of central Italy, where the olive harvest is in full swing...

I had come to the farm near Mondaino to get "closer to the soil". Yet, as it had turned out, I was balancing perilously high above it, deep in the innards of a scratchy olive tree in the autumn browned-hills where Emilia-Romagna melts into Le Marche in central Italy.

With my foot wedged firmly in a fork of the gnarled old tree, and my hand resting on one of its more solid-looking branches, I was precariously reaching up into the leaves with a rake. I could see a cluster of olives on a thinner branch. They were very blue looking in the dappled sunshine, almost like grapes.

I reached for the branch with the teeth of the rake and stroked them downwards, ripping through the sharp leaves. There were satisfying plopping sounds as several olives rained down into the net we had cast below. The purple fruits rolled down the steeply sloped ground like marbles before being caught in the valley at the bottom of the net that we had created by staking the edges with sharpened sticks. This was my second day as a WWOOFer.

I met a pair of American WWOOFers, freshly graduated students from California, working on a neighbouring farm, who had arrived in Mondaino after a stretch of vegetable farming in Spain. They had then gathered grapes in France and the Piedmont in northern Italy. Next they were headed to the wild Abruzzo to tend goats and would from there go on to Sicily for the orange harvest. It sounded like the agricultural version of the Grand Tour.

If that sounds too tame, my olive-picking mentor Basil had WWOOFed himself in the Yukon in north-western Canada, where he had worked in the cold mountains with a blind goat herd who could sense the terrain with his powers of hearing.

But for those of us in need of something greater to believe in than mere economic travel, WWOOF offers a glimpse of an alternative way of living - a more sustainable lifestyle that works with and not against nature. The WWOOFers come from

all over the world to learn first-hand about organic growing. Working, cooking, eating and drinking side by side with their hosts, it's a multi-lingual experiment in communal living and cultural exchange.

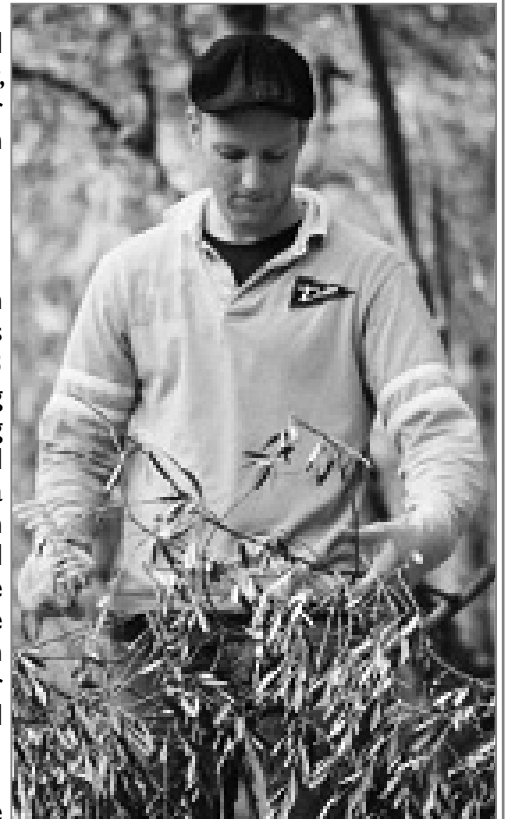
Something to believe in

My hosts were a couple of artists from England called Phelan and Suzie, Basil's parents, who had bought the land 23 years before with the intention of living off it sustainably. Phelan had the twinkling eyes of an incorrigible romantic and looked always on the brink of instigating a revolution for the sheer mischievous fun of it. He, a man who used to drive around in a van with a methane gas tank on the roof and doves of peace painted on the side, had embraced WWOOF as soon as he had heard of it - describing it over several glasses of delicious self-made red wine as "a sort of anarchy".

After encountering initial scepticism, he had seen his ideas of eschewing pesticides and insecticides spread around his fellow farmers in the Mondaino area. He hoped the world wide network of WWOOFers would help disseminate organic ideals much further, like birds carrying seeds on their winter migrations. "Do you think in 10 years time WWOOFing will be a really big movement?" he asked, pouring me another glass from a five-litre flask.

Well, what vessel spreads ideas more effectively than through charm? The temporary home you share as a WWOOFer can often be of an authentic beauty that no plush hotel could match except in pseudo-pastiche. The terracotta-roofed farmhouse in Mondaino was painted a pastel-shade of ochre that turned salmon pink in the bright sun. It was fronted by a handsome veranda fashioned by some felled tree trunks, which had been entangled in yellowed vines. Inside the house a cosy yellow kitchen was heated by a wood stove. Beside an open fire, with a chimney the shape of a witch's hat, a large greyhound was usually folded yoga-like into a worn yellow armchair that was far too small for her.

Once, at lunch, a hen came through the front door and strutted nonchalantly around the room, casually ignored by the dog. Evidently bored by the lack of worms, grubs and attention, she stalked out again. It's true that on winter nights authentic



farmhouses can be cold and draft-ridden as well as picturesque, but which of us doesn't need a touch of toughening up in this neurotic age?

Up my tree, meanwhile, I had a grandstand view of the natural beauty of the Italian countryside. Through the curtain of leaves, I looked back over the other blue-green trees in the grove, over the house, over the fruit-laden branches of a persimmon tree, over the yellow parallel lines of the recently harvested vines, over the exploding colours of a copse of woods - foraged by truffle hunters - to the hills beyond.

These hills were ridged waves of green and brown that stretched as far as the high mountains of the Apennines. Tan hill-towns were surfing the crests of the waves and you could even see the spires of the Renaissance masterpiece Urbino in the distance. On the next crest was the village of Mondaino, its rounded bell-tower very red in the sun.

But don't think the countryside is a quiet idyll. The hens and guinea-fowl of Italy are as vocally expansive as its people and the ducks exploded in a cackling laughter when I dropped my olive-combing rake. There were shots from the local hunters that roam the woods. Half the countryside, meanwhile, was out bringing in the olive harvest and sometimes stanzas

of Italian songs would drift across from neighbouring groves.

Yes, WWOOFing can be an unforgettable experience, but your pleasures often have to be earned in sweat. The actual picking of olives was romantic and picturesque work, but I was left gasping for breath after lugging the filled crates back up the vertiginous slopes of the grove. In one grove the ground had been kept clean by digging pigs, which we had to tempt into the sties with acorn treats before we could start picking. But the second grove, too big to be fenced off for pigs, had been infested with canes and undergrowth. Before laying the nets, we had to clear the roots, brambles and shoots out of the overgrown grove with a sickle. Although it was November, I was soon so hot I had to work in a T-shirt.

But this was partly why I was here. There is an atavistic satisfaction about earning your keep with manual labour, particularly if you are usually desk-bound. We worked until the song of a blackbird announced the onset of evening, and then walked home through the woods in the dusk with aching muscles, ravenous hunger and a scythe slung over our shoulders. It was a feeling of completeness.

Tasting the soil

An appetite is a useful thing to have when you are in Italy, of course. As well as by my interest in ecology, I had been first drawn to WWOOFing by the chance of deepening my relationship with food. In the farmhouse in Emilia-Romagna our meals at night were often made entirely from produce grown or reared on the small-holding - from the rich green salads (I did not know you could eat thistles) to the seasoning herbs, to the mushrooms found in the forest to the meat itself (vegetarians should choose their hosts carefully).

Even the bread was home-baked by a fellow WWOOFer in a charcoal oven by the open log fire. In the morning we spread it with pomegranate jam that we had made after squeezing the over-ripe fruit on the veranda until our hands were stained blood red. On a day when an eastern wind brought in rain from the nearby Adriatic I spent a morning in a shed helping make next year's wine.

It's the tasting of organically produced food rather than ideological argumentation that is likely to convince you of the benefits of gentle non-industrial farming methods.

The greens from Suzie's gardens, the mixture of spinach and dandelion leaves, were melt-in-the-mouth delicious. Small cuts of meat from the free-roaming chickens gave an incredible depth of flavour.

And it was the same with last year's olive oil, which we drizzled copiously over Victoria's bread. Much of the olive oil you will buy in the supermarket has been harvested by machines that grab the tree and shake the olives down like a terrier shakes the neck of a rabbit. By hand picking you reduce the amount of bruising and ensure maximum flavour - as well as showing a bit more respect to the land that feeds us.

Fruits of labour

After two weeks on the farm, on a day when overnight snow had blanketed the high Apennines, we took this year's olives to the press. We hauled our crates into a Land Rover and drove over winding roads for a few kilometres to a village within sight of the cloud-banked Adriatic coastline. During the harvesting season the pressing room is running 24 hours a day and cap-wearing farmers were loitering among stacks of crates by the weighing machine.

Several machines were chuntering away, each attended by an overall-wearing worker. One machine was stripping any leaves and twigs away, while another, which comprised of a pair of huge granite wheels at least five feet in diameter and stained an ecclesiastical purple by the olive skins, was grinding in hypnotic circles over a porridge-bed of olives. The whole room looked like the fantasy of a cartoon mad professor.

Finally there was a centrifuge to separate the oil from the water, and from that machine a steady stream of fresh oil was pouring into a shiny metal vat that we had brought with us. The oil was incredibly green and clear and smelled redolent of the crop fields of the disappeared summer. If you dipped your finger into the stream and tasted it straight out of the press it left a prickly peppery sensation in your throat. It was nearly 3 am when we collected the last drop of oil. By that time I was tired as



a dog, but Phelan - a veteran of a score of harvests - was still skipping around in child-like enthusiasm as the fruit of our labours emerged.

The next day I set off back to Vienna with a bottle of the fresh oil in my bag, knowing I had experienced much more than a "cheap holiday" since I had been picked up on the coast by a clapped out yellow Cinquecento a fortnight before, looking like the misguided hero of the Blur song, for a respite from "the century's anxiety".

I'd got much more than that, even, if the sad truth be known, I had been mostly a pretty useless and clumsy agricultural helper. I'd lost a sickle in the undergrowth, bent a scythe and trod on bunches of olives and ruined them. I had to be shown everything and couldn't even light the open fire on my own.

But, just as it easy to believe you know a lot when you live in the cosmopolitan city with Auntie Google constantly on beck and call, it is refreshing - rejuvenating even - to realise that in fact you know remarkably little.

My hosts were unfailing patient and instructive. Their hospitality had a humbling effect, just like the grandiose countryside of Italy. You no longer want to be clever and be admired; you just wanted to be a small part of this wonderful place.

Christian Cummins is a journalist at the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation's radio Fm4: <http://fm4.orf.at>.

This article and all photographs: © Christian Cummins.

This article first appeared in the WWOOF Independents newsletter.

woofing in wales

Chelsea Overseas writes: One of the many blessings of traveling is learning about the movements that are gaining support and popularity in parts of the world that you would normally never be exposed to. While working at the hostel in Sevilla and meeting hundreds of young travelers, I noticed the number of WWOOFers rising every day.

All in a Day's Work

And why shouldn't it be? In this cash-strapped economy (to put it lightly) where there are thousands of young, enthusiastic, and skilled individuals looking to contribute to and gain from this big big world, it makes perfect sense that WWOOFing should be an optimal means of travel. It's cheap and incredibly beneficial-- while the economic factor certainly appealed to me, I was also very drawn to it for the more 'local' travel experience it offers, as well as the practical gardening and farming skills I would acquire and be able to apply when I got home. In the spirit of joining forces with others to ride out this wave of recession and acquire necessary sustainable skills for the new age, I signed right up for a UK membership.

I first set my sights on WWOOFing in the Scottish Highlands, having had several friends rave about the beauty and culture of rural Scottish life. After two weeks of searching for a place on a farm, I realized too many other travelers had the same idea as me, and I redirected my search towards destinations on the road-less-traveled: Wales. No sooner had I done that that I received good news, and was offered a spot with Edible Landscaping (www.ediblelandscaping.co.uk), a private enterprise based on the ideals and practices of permaculture in the Cardiff area.

I must have looked like a lost Californian girl looking for the beach arriving at the smallholding the way I did - no work boots, no gloves, no raincoat, no real experience with land or animals. But I did bring a real willingness to learn at my new job, and my hosts were patient with me as they led me by the hand nearly every step of the way. And very soon I decided I believed in the work my hosts did, finding myself agreeing with their approach to the environment and our responsibilities to it. Permaculture itself really interested me; as a practically-minded person, I totally got on board with its principles. First of all, it stresses the importance of utilizing the land that you have to its utmost advantage, taking into consideration the conditions, terrain, space and resources in order to grow something at both its highest productivity and lowest carbon footprint. This means sacrificing aesthetics for less beautiful crops that when planted strategically will grow and produce more at the cost of fewer resources- more bang for your environmental buck, if you will.

Another credence of permaculture is the waste that you accrue from being a consumer of the Earth's

materials should be put back into the system and used again somehow.

Composting is the most obvious example of this. But for my hosts this includes animals as well. My hosts were home to five lovely ducks and five less-lovely chickens, both used for laying eggs. The ducks in particular specialized in



a form of natural pesticides and were in charge of eating slugs and other pesky crop enemies.

During my two-week stay we ate at least 50% of our meals straight out of the ground. I picked broccoli, dug up potatoes and onions, plucked edible flowers, gathered lettuce, and countless other foods that I took straight from the garden to the kitchen and prepared for dinner. And I can safely say I have rarely felt such acute wellness. Beyond the health factors, the environmental benefits are huge as well. With the impending energy crisis being constantly swept under the rug, it is imperative that people learn to become more self-sufficient and sustainable.

Planting our own food seems like a quaint throwback to the days of yore, but WWOOFing has made me realize it is the movement towards the future. We can no longer deplete the limited energy sources, nor can we depend on them for very much longer-- becoming less dependent on prepackaged store-bought food is one major way to cut down on energy dependency.

Along this line of thinking comes the element of planned communities. As my host is an instructor of Permaculture at Cardiff University, I was very lucky to tag along with her class on a field trip to visit Coed Hills, an eco-community and art space where dozens of young people have agreed to share and cultivate their 80 acres of land responsibly. In addition to many crops, they use solar heating, raise their own goats for milk and cheese, keep bees, and have used their creativity to maximize the resources they do need. Showers, for example, are connected to the green houses, and the water helps maintain the moist temperature and water the plants in the greenhouse.

Continued on back page

incredible edible AGM

This year our Annual Gathering and AGM is being held in the lively market town of Todmorden, in the beautiful Calder Valley. We are being hosted by the Incredible Edibles of Todmorden, who have been doing inspirational things with vegetables in public spaces and encouraging the public to help themselves to the produce!

We will have a tour of their very public growing sites, as well as a chance to roll up our sleeves and do some digging alongside the locals. Food is being provided by the local Bear Cafe, located above the town's wholefood coop.

Saturday evening includes a chance for everyone to share their WWOOFing and hosting stories. A story-sharing

event will be facilitated by Edward Acland (WWOOF UK Director) and Carl Rogers (WWOOF Independents ex-coordinator). Please bring along your favourite WWOOF tales, a poem or song to share.

This is your annual opportunity to meet up with other WWOOFers and hosts. A chance to catch up with old friends, make new ones and to meet the people who keep the wheels of WWOOF turning. We are sure this will be a truly inspiring weekend and we hope to see many of you there. New members are particularly welcome.

Have a look at what's been going on with pop-up gardens in Todmorden: www.incredible-edible-todmorden.co.uk/

Midday, 18th - 2pm, 19 September 2010 – Todmorden, Lancashire

Names (and ages of children): _____

Address: _____

Home Tel: _____ Email: _____

I shall be driving from _____ and can offer lifts to _____ people

I would like a lift from _____ area

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Send your application by post to: Richard Hazell, c/o Wiltshire Law Centre, Temple House, 115-118 Commercial Road, Swindon, SN1 5PL, or email to richard.hazell@wwoof.org, or fax to 01793 432193.



london twins work the land

Standing still for a second, dripping wet and hungry in the chilly rain, a sturdy four-foot stick in one hand and a load of damp ferns in the other; I thought back a week: a sunny Brixton pad full of half-packed homely artefacts and bulging charity bags. The memory felt further away than London, and a lot longer ago than a week. I smiled.

My twin sister and I left London in a flurry of activity, depositing the much-reduced contents of our flat at our parents' house en route to Brithdir Mawr, the first of two WWOOF hosts lined up for the summer. We were on a mission to downsize and skill-up and that landed us, after several hours on a train, in deepest, darkest Pembrokeshire.

Brithdir is an intentional community of twelve who are working towards a more sustainable lifestyle. My lasting impressions are of intense lush greenery and calm; the noisiest creatures were the surprisingly vocal ducks. There was always a lot to do, but rarely any rush. Volunteering to cook communal meals for the day meant a full day's preparation, collecting ingredients from the gardens, crop fields and polytunnels and cooking either on an open fire or the ancient wood-fuelled stove.

One evening, a few of us went for a bike ride. I was lucky enough to ride with pro-cyclist Jamie on the back of the tandem, so, apart from pedalling harder when I was told to, I had very little to do except enjoy the view. It had been a damp day and mist hung heavily as we wound our way through the base of the valley. It was incredibly beautiful and hugely complemented by the relative silence of travelling by pedal power.

Densely wooded and apparently remote, the valley which homes the intentional community at Brithdir is actually well populated with alternative lifestyles: there's 'That Roundhouse' (famous during the 90's for a ten year battle to claim retrospective planning permission) and several other WWOOF hosts all within walking or cycling distance.

During our time there, we learned a lot about the practical ins and outs of living sustainably (everything from organic gardening, through wood chopping to renewable energy). It was also wonderful



to live within a community that so obviously worked well together; the cumulative knowledge and understanding of the twelve members could have filled a library. We were very sad to leave.

Our second stint of WWOOFing took place just outside Shrewsbury at a family-run agroforestry permaculture project called Karuna. We arrived, sweaty and tired, after a whirlwind weekend of travel and adventure. Our hosts, Janta and Merav, greeted us warmly with tea and a quick tour.

Even though it was going on for five, there was still a lot to achieve that day. We unpacked quickly in our new home - a gorgeous bell tent by a newly created lake (again with the noisy ducks) - and went to help dig over a few square metres of earth. That evening was the summer solstice and we celebrated first with friends and beer at a local pub, and then with music and dancing at a nearby stone circle, watching the sky turn pink as dawn approached.

Karuna is an astonishing place. Bought as agricultural land (a few large grazing fields) just five years ago, the Wheelhouse family have transformed it into a magical leaf-fringed sanctuary, planting over 7 1/2 thousand trees (including over 80 varieties of apple tree).

The word 'Karuna' comes from an Aldous Huxley novel about a utopian island civilisation. Once we came to understand this project more intimately, the name became even more fitting; Karuna is in an area of Shropshire that is used primarily for grazing and large single-crop fields. On the surface, with rolling green fields as far as the eye can see, this area is 'picture perfect'. In reality, things are very different: heavy farming machinery trundles

dangerously down the tiny lanes that circle Karuna's 18 acres; in adjacent fields, distressed cows and sheep bay and low at all hours, recently separated from their young, often accompanied by the steady whine of the 24 hour silage maker. Amidst this unexpected bedlam, Karuna is truly an island.

Our days at Karuna were long, hard and fulfilling. I fell in love with the scythe, using it to mow tall grass and weeds from around and between young trees. We mulched, composted, weeded and sowed, learning all the time about what it really means to live softly on the land. I'm writing this from my new flat in London. It's stifling and I can't help compare my heat-induced lethargy with the honest sweat of a day's labour.

We spent a lot of our free time, together with hosts and fellow volunteers, in a clearing right in the heart of Karuna. Surrounded by young trees, we were shaded and protected from the wind that otherwise rips across this flattened landscape. Sweet birdsong and rustling leaves accompanied conversation. In the evening, the cooler sun would lance golden swords through the trees. All this, together with good food, engaging conversation and the company of people who hold nature and respect at their core, made Huxley's utopian Karuna seem very tangible.

However, our trip was not all bike rides and birdsong; for both sites, utopia has been cordoned off with red tape. In Brithdir's case, the Welsh Assembly Government are pushing through a badger cull on the co-op's land in the misguided hope of reducing TB in cattle. This is despite much evidence that suggests the cull will have the opposite effect. For Karuna, local planning mayhem confounds the project at every turn, becoming more and more ridiculous in its obstinate lack of common sense.

The joint challenges of climate change and peak oil make this a critical time for our country's agricultural practice. Brithdir Mawr and Karuna are more than beacons of hope; they are practical demonstrations of how to live more resilient and sustainable lifestyles. If you feel surrounded by too much talk and not enough action, I recommend either of these projects as the perfect remedy - **Lucy Langdon**.

the classifieds

Please note that a flat rate of £10 for up to 50 words will be applied to all adverts in the classified section. Please send adverts to editor@wwoof.org.uk and cash or UK bank cheque to the main office: WWOOF UK, PO Box 2154, Winslow, Buckinghamshire, MK18 3WS. Payment must be received by the copy deadline in order for your advert to be printed. WWOOF accepts no responsibility for the accuracy of advertisements and does not endorse the products and services offered. You are advised to check before availing yourself of what is offered.

Housesitter /PA /Admin Assistant wanted, for beautiful horticultural farm near London for 6 months 1/10 till 1/4. The right person is flexible, resourceful, adaptable and sociable. Drivers licence and experience using excel/word etc essential. Experience on farms a plus. Other people will be on site. Accommodation and small wage offered. Website www.future-living.co.uk Apply to info@future-living.co.uk.

Opportunity for individual (and or friend) who may like to start a small nursery garden in Pembrokeshire (Nr. Tenby) Accommodation available. Details: 01834 810157 or 07977 210250

WWOOFING FOR WOOFERS! Happy, kind, reliable COUPLE needed, 5/6 month dog-sit for 3 laidback, great dogs NOV '10 to MAY '11. Wooden house in woodland-garden valley on North Norfolk coast. Beautiful, quiet, rustic location, woodburner, electricity, close by Cromer town. No (over) drinkers/ indoor smokers. diana.mavroleon@gmail.com tel: 07782331766

Websites, intranets and online shops: 250 inclusive of design, setup, personal tuition, domain name, web & email hosting and support. Full featured sites with unique cms system to enable easy DIY amendments. Great value and great service from a small, ethical, green company established 2003 with dozens of happy customers (read customers' comments at www.ethicalinternet.co.uk). If all you require is a domain name and hosting, this is also available at just £35 per year. Contact peter@ethicalinternet.co.uk, 07729 103263

Active outdoor couple, with own camper van and elderly dog would like a small area on a farm or similar during the winter months to rent or wwoof in exchange. Prefer England or Wales. Contact Josie on j999steele@hotmail.com or tel 07776180044

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I recently wrote a research paper called Land Use Options for Sustainable Farming, which has been published by the Food Climate Research Network at the University of Surrey, and will shortly be reprinted in Agroforestry News. In it, as the title suggests, I look at various land use options such as conventional growing, no till organic growing with imported fertility, organic growing based on tilled green manure leys, grazing ruminants, nut orchards and woodland in relation to food energy produced, greenhouse gas emissions and fossil fuel use. My conclusions favour growing vegetables organically with the fertility produced on site. Nut orchards also perform well – though they're currently quite an experimental option – and the analysis also supports livestock when it's integrated with other parts of the farm, kept on permanent pasture or woodland, and fed on forage rather than concentrates. There are many ways in which the analysis could undoubtedly be refined, so I'd be interested if other hosts or WWOOFers have any comments on the paper – you can find it on my website at <http://www.vallisveg.co.uk/landuseoptions.html>. Thanks!

Chris Smaje, Vallis Veg, Frome, Somerset.

Inspirational, commercial, organic award-winning horticultural holding near Hay-on-Wye. Permaculture principles, forest garden, low carbon farming, renewable energy, sustainable building. Interests: singing, chanting, sound healing. Very varied work and learning. Food and accommodation provided. Some paid work opportunities. Particularly

suitable to motivated people. Contact Paul at Primrose Organic Centre 01497 847636 paul.benham@ukonline.co.uk www.primroseearthcentre.org.uk

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Free to WWOOF workers, small hut in wood for rest and peace. Stove, crockery provided. Single mattress available, loo and tap 100 yards, solar shower (weather allowing). North Cornwall coast, 6 miles. 01208 812603

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In those two short weeks I was blessed to learn the ideals and skills of a lifestyle that is surely called for in such a dark age. Long-term changes in the approach to the environment are needed if my generation is to not only survive our era, but contribute to future ones. I feel very grateful to be born and raised in California, where such an awareness is healthy and thriving. I am already looking so forward to moving to Santa Cruz, where organic farms, vegetarian and low-impact lifestyles, and conscious consumerism abound.

Wwoofing definitely opened me up to a new lifestyle that I hope to continue in the future, but I also took a number of social lessons from it as well. I did not realize at first that accepting a position in someone's home meant I would be thrown so far into the mix of their family! Sharing every meal and every evening with a new family does bring you close rather fast, and it was clear they saw the Wwoofers (myself, French Claire and Australian Liam) as extensions of their little unit. We witnessed tantrums thrown by their adolescent son and quibbles between husband and wife, as well as tender family moments shared by the fire and on Sunday morning breakfasts.



It was sometimes a tricky balancing act to be both a member of the action and a respectful observer at a distance. But it was interesting entering abruptly into the intimacy of a small family and leaving just as abruptly 2 weeks later.

With the many different lessons I learned Wwoofing, it is definitely one of the highlights of my trip out here, and one that will continue to have its impact on me as I make my home in California again. I wish more people could have the opportunity to learn hands-on the benefits of sustainability while traveling internationally and being welcomed in a stranger's home. I hope more Americans become willing to set aside their doubts and fears and take a chance on Wwoofing!

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Wwoof UK, P.O. Box 2154, Winslow, Bucks, MK18 3WS