

WWOOF UK NEWS

world wide opportunities on organic farms

issue 232

autumn 2011



**Meet some of our hosts and hear
WWOOFing tales as we celebrate
WWOOF's 40th birthday**

www.wwoof.org.uk

editorial

Welcome to the Autumn edition of the WWOOF UK newsletter!

Happy 40th Birthday WWOOF! It has been a real joy putting this issue together. It's heartwarming to hear about the difference WWOOF has made to so many people's lives, let alone to the face of organic agriculture.

By all accounts the spirit of WWOOF has changed little in it's 40 years, remaining much as it always has been – a great way to connect like-minds with each other and the land and offer practical help when it's so very needed. A huge congratulations to every single person involved in making WWOOF such an attractive 40 year old – may there be many happy returns!

Remember – do come and celebrate, what you and others have achieved at the birthday party and AGM – turn to page 10 for details and booking form. It promises to be a great weekend of fun and friendship, and of course, lots of WWOOFing!

Happy harvest,

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 11 issue

31st Jan for Spring 12 issue

30th April for Summer 12 issue

31st July for Autumn 12 issue

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

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

news from the office

The UK team are constantly working to improve our IT system/website and, as a result, the whole WVVOOF experience. Happily, in recent months we have been able to resolve some longstanding issues and can now begin to concentrate on improving what's already there.

Since the last newsletter and in response to the dual host concerns about receiving spam via WVVOOF UK and being swamped by correspondence from WVVOOFers sending mass emails, we have introduced a 'contact' button for volunteers to use when getting in touch with a host for the first time. This is very user-friendly, prevents mass-mailings and is available from the host's details just as their email address used to be.

Apart from receiving less emails, the huge benefit for hosts is that when they receive an email they can immediately see the volunteer's ID and whether their membership is valid. Once the host replies to the WVVOOFer their email address becomes visible so that there can be direct communication between host and volunteer. We have had very positive feedback from hosts about this change and no complaints or enquiries from WVVOOFers, so it feels like a really good step forward. One host asked us to change the system slightly so that it is more obvious who the initial email came from, and we did that too.

On 1st July we were able to introduce an exciting bonus to UK membership holders: free WVVOOF Independents membership! This means that our volunteers can access the Independents host list and arrange to WVVOOF with them without having to pay an additional membership fee. How good is that?! The link was used 273 times during July and we hope many more WVVOOFers will be able to extend their WVVOOFing experience in future. Big thanks to WVWIND for agreeing to this.

The newsletter is now available on the website to online members: you need to login to your account to see it. We continue to send it by post to all book members who live in the UK and hosts. If you receive the newsletter by post but no longer wish to, please let us know by emailing info@wwoof.org.uk.

Our other major news is that we have another new UK Host Contact (previously known as Farm Host Secretary). Alissa joined us when Mike Hammer left and hit the ground running by drawing on all her previous experience with WVVOOF. Then she was headhunted for her dream job and felt obliged to leave us (although she will continue to edit the newsletter). Thanks Alissa for your short-but-sweet input!

Now we are very fortunate to be joined by Taryn Field who has experience as a WVVOOFer, has been a host for seven years and has managed courses for LILLI - our sister

organisation and office co-habitants - for the same length of time. She's great fun and we are delighted she is joining us.

And finally, it's a big year for meetings, conferences and gatherings! In May, the European WVVOOF Co-ordinators' Meeting took place in the Czech Republic. The conference was a great success with 21 countries represented and close to 50 delegates. A great number of topics-in-common were covered including immigration and visas, having a WVVOOF Europe entity, communication systems and standardising host criteria. WVVOOF Council was represented by Richard Hazell (Director), Scarlett Penn (UK Co-ordinator), Carl Rogers (WVVOOF International Development) and Ian Baird (WVVOOF Independents).

Following on from this is the International Co-ordinators' Meeting in Korea in September, to be held in tandem with the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) conference in Seoul. Council thought long and hard about whether to send delegates, weighing up the environmental impact of air miles and financial cost to the organisation versus the benefit derived from productive international communication, our responsibilities to smaller and emerging WVVOOF groups, and the importance of a strong world-wide network. After much debate, the decision was taken to finance one representative from each organisation: Scarlett Penn (UK Co-ordinator), Ian Baird (WVVOOF Independents) and incoming WVVOOF International Development Co-ordinator Amanda Pearson. Amanda is taking over from Carl Rogers who has been extremely dedicated in this (and the Independents) role over many years, and has supported several WVVOOF national organisations in getting started. Amanda has lots of experience WVVOOFing in the UK and on the continent and she has also been a host, and has a very strong background in food culture amongst young people. She has recently begun training with Carl and will soon take on the role fully, so welcome Amanda and merci beaucoup et au revoir to Carl!

Because we are now in WVVOOF's 40th year, it was felt that the presence of Sue Coppard - founder of WVVOOF back in 1971 - would also be significant and welcomed at the international conference. WVVOOF Australia very kindly volunteered to pay her airfare from the UK, and WVVOOF Korea will cover all other costs while she is in the country.

Which brings us to the final gathering to be mentioned here: the AGM and 40th birthday celebrations, which Sue will also be part of. This will take place on 15th and 16th October at Bore Place in Kent. Further information and details can be found later on in the newsletter, but please do book up and come along to help us celebrate 40 years of wonderful WVVOOFing around the world!

hosts with the most

To celebrate WWOOF's 40th birthday we've interviewed hosts who represent some kind of extreme within the organisation. They've given us a fascinating insight, not just into the unexpected joys and challenges of being a host, but also into the huge diversity that WWOOF UK now encompasses within its host membership.

Longest Standing: Jan McMillan, Postlip Housing Association, Gloucestershire

Jan McMillan has been a member of Postlip Housing Association from the start. "I have a photo here dated 23.11.1972. It's a picture of one of our work weekends, and there are 7 people on it that I don't recognise. Some of them will have been our first ever WWOOFers!"

Five families took Postlip Hall on in 1971, the same year that WWOOF started. The grounds were derelict and the house itself needed quite a lot of work. "We had a friend visit in the middle of our frantic clear-up, and he said 'What you need is some WWOOFers!' So we joined."

For the residents in those early days, every weekend was a working weekend. "At that time, WWOOF was running weekend groups. We didn't always get WWOOFers joining in, but whenever we could get the extra hands we were glad of the help." They still use a similar format today. "Now we only take WWOOFers 1 weekend each month, usually 2 at a time. We strongly believe that WWOOFers should have someone from Postlip working alongside them, so that they always have the option of company, and it's only possible for us to do that on weekends."

Jan has noticed a definite change in the reasons that people come WWOOFing over the years. "When we started it was mostly people getting away from the city and into the countryside. Now it's people coming to learn in order to set up their own smallholdings – alongside a tremendous number of foreign students!" She senses there has also been a change in the host demographic. "People are often surprised at our laid back way of doing things. I think there are more WWOOF hosts that are commercial enterprises these days, which we are not. We get some very positive feedback, so I think people must enjoy our approach."

Postlip is now mostly self-sufficient in vegetables and entirely in eggs and meat. "We used to keep goats for dairy, but the children had a walk out protest and refused to drink it!" Today there are 8 families sharing the house and the land and WWOOFers can get involved in the garden, with the livestock (including bees) or perhaps do some stone walling. "Other than reducing the number of times we host



Postlip Community in Gloucestershire

WWOOFers, I don't think our attitude has changed since the beginning. It's an exchange where WWOOFers can be part of our lives for a short time. They come and help out; we treat them well and feed them well." And perhaps there is something special in the air at Postlip: "We've been responsible for at least 2 weddings between WWOOFers who met here."

Jan has yet to go WWOOFing herself – "I did some when I attended early WWOOF meetings, and we spent the afternoons WWOOFing." – and has only met 1 other host in the area. "I'm just amazed at how much the organisation has grown! It was so tiny when we started; the fact that it's now worldwide is amazing. I think it will just keep on growing – I certainly hope so."

"I just want to say well done WWOOF – it's a fantastic organisation, keep on with the good work!"

Most Remote: Andy and Sabina Holt-Brook, North House Croft, Papa Stour, Shetland

The journey to Andy and Sabina's croft on Papa Stour is an adventure in itself. "Most WWOOFers are not rich, so they get the overnight ferry from Aberdeen at 7pm, docking at Lerwick at 7.30 a.m. They then spend the day in the town and catch a bus at 5p.m. as far as Bixter. Here they pick up a minibus feeder service. This takes them 10 miles down a single-track road to the ferry at West Burrafirth. It's a 40 minute journey across to Papa, and we meet them at the pier and drive them round the bay to our croft." Between 4 and 8 intrepid WWOOFers make this journey each year.

Andy and Sabina have been on Papa Stour, a designated SSSI, for 38 years. "We dropped out in the 60s and wanted to move to somewhere by the sea, with land, clean air and clean water for our children. Us moving here, along with a few other hippy families, prevented the island from being emptied of its population." The small organic vegetable business they started didn't last long. "The shops wanted a year-round, regular supply from us, but the short growing season coupled with the unreliable transport links back then made it impossible. Once, we had a batch of freshly harvested cauliflowers stranded here for 3 weeks during a particularly bad storm. Nowadays we mostly rear Shetland-cross lamb for the Scottish market."

The croft still produces a good range of fruit and vegetables for home consumption. "We grow lots of brassicas in the walled garden, including Shetland kale for the sheep." Broad beans do well, as do raspberries and currants of all varieties. Surprisingly, strawberries are incredibly abundant: "It must be something to do with the long daylight hours, as it can't be the heat!"

Initially life on the island was fairly primitive. "We drew our water from a well, lighting was done by Tilly lamps, we didn't get electricity until 1990. No-one would travel here to WWOOF just for a weekend, it was too far, so those who came simply stayed longer."

Today the population of the island is down to just 10 people. In the winter, otters outnumber people. "The hut that WWOOFers stay in has a family of otters living beneath it. We often watch them playing and fishing from the kitchen

window. We are also usually visited once a year by the orcas.”

The best bit about being a host? “Meeting lots of people of many different nationalities. And being OAPs it’s great having the physical help. It’s wonderful to see that so many young people are interested in self sufficiency these days.” And the most difficult bit? “Language is sometimes tricky with WWOOFers who have limited English – it can take lots of ingenuity to communicate!”

And finally, a birthday greeting for WWOOF: “May it go from strength to strength. We need lots more hosts so that young people, who are so urbanised these days, can get in touch with where their food really comes from.”

Smallest Host: Phoenix Woodcrafts, Kate Fox and Andy Gill, West Sussex

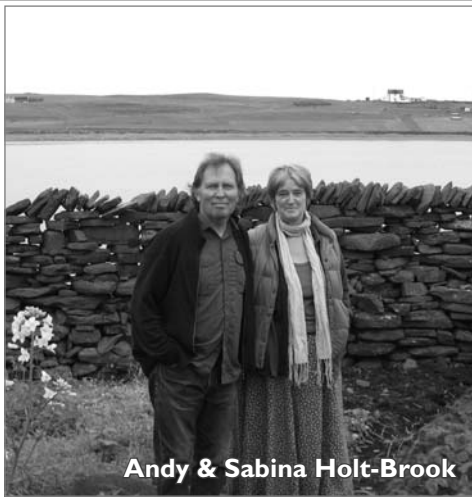
Kate and Andy describe their 120 square feet of garden as their ‘micro-holding’. From this diverse patch they are almost completely self-sufficient in vegetables, fruit and eggs. They became WWOOF hosts last October. “We were WWOOFers ourselves and always chose to visit places that would inspire us, that we could learn from. What we have created here is exactly what we wanted to see – essentially a normal house with a garden.”

The row of terraced Victorian cottages where Kate and Andy live were built with big front gardens, “...so that the railway workers living here could grow all their own veg and keep pigs, chickens and goats.” Today they are the only ones in the terrace growing for self-sufficiency. “We live in quite a conservative area, there’s not really an alternative culture at all. But people are very open minded. Our neighbours probably think we’re a bit mad, as we’re a bit elaborate in our design and layout of things in the garden, but they generally seem impressed.”

The garden makes creative use of the available space to produce 16 different kinds of fruit and up to 40 different kinds of vegetables at the height of summer. Fruit trees are fan trained up against the boundary fences and even the roof of the summerhouse is used for producing food. Somehow, there is still room for wildlife areas and a small pond.

“We do lots of bottling and preserving. One third of everything we grow is stored for the winter. By March-April we’re living on parsnips, leeks, salsify, chard and spinach, plus any wild greens we can harvest. We don’t buy anything if we can help it.”

The most challenging thing about becoming a WWOOF host has been learning how to successfully share the tiny house with volunteers. “It’s been a massive learning curve – not a bad thing, it just takes some getting used to. By the time we had our third WWOOFers we decided to write some house rules!”



Andy & Sabina Holt-Brook

“We get at least 2 emails a day, people seem to really want to come here. We try to choose those who are really looking to learn from us, as the best bit about being a host is when people leave us excited and inspired.”

Their hopes for WWOOF 40 years from now? “More of the same please! I’m sure WWOOF will continue to grow, but hopefully the organisation will stay much the same.”

Largest Host: Claire and Andrew Fletcher, Ardlussa Estate, Isle of Jura

Claire and Andrew moved from Glasgow about 4 years ago to live full time in their family home on the Isle of Jura. The house is on the Ardlussa Estate, and at 18,000 acres this is the largest WWOOF host property. “We’d heard about WWOOF from a few people, and then I picked up a hitcher on the island who was actually WWOOFing at the time, and he convinced me. Our first ever volunteer was a nice French guy. He came for 2 weeks to start with, but we got on so well that he came back again and stayed for 6!”

Around 6 or 7 WWOOFers visit the estate each year. “We’d like to take more, but we don’t really have the space as we’re also running a bed and breakfast. WWOOFers get the same accommodation as our B&B guests which is a nice surprise for them.”

Most people who travel to Ardlussa are interested in experiencing life on a Scottish island, rather than having a particular interest in the size of the place. “We’re managing 18,000 acres and we’re very isolated. We stipulate that people make their own way here so that they understand how far away from everything it is! It is very beautiful, but also very remote.”

“In our first year as hosts we took everyone who applied. Now we get a couple of hundred enquiries each year so we really seek out people with relevant experience. We keep pigs, highland cattle, sheep and deer, as well as having a walled garden and polytunnel and growing as much food as we can. We’ve also got a lot of forest to manage, so people who have chainsaw certificates or mechanical experience are especially helpful. We had a Canadian lumberjack who was just brilliant. I don’t think he stopped eating the entire time he was here! When he went back he got himself some highland cattle.” It’s also been a two-way exchange of knowledge – “I’ve learned plenty from our WWOOFers about growing food.”

The best bit about being a host? “The camaraderie when you’re getting on well with someone. You’re teaching them something new, they’re enjoying learning it, they’re enjoying a taste of your life and you’re getting help. We like good company, and having WWOOFers is something we as a whole family really enjoy.” Andrew has marked every WWOOFer’s home on a Google earth map, and they’re still in contact with many of them.

“In another 40 years, I imagine WWOOF will be full of old people who did it when they were students going round again! No, seriously, I think it will be going strong, be more mainstream. More and more people are growing their own food or are interested in where their food comes from – even the B&B guests want to know where their food comes from, let alone the WWOOFers. I’d like to do it myself, but I can’t see it happening for 20 years.”

“Keep on WWOOFING!”

hosts' birthday wishes

Thanks to all our Hosts for their well-wishes!

Robin and Wei-Wei

Congratulations to WVVOOF on its 40th Birthday! Today we are also celebrating because we are hosting our 40th WVVOOFer!

Anne Brown

Where would I be without wonderful WVVOOFers? Over the past five years, ever since I heard about the organisation, our Arabian stud has hosted over 60 volunteers from places as far apart as Brazil (Ricardo) and Japan (Yukino - FIVE times!).

Special friends who will stay in our hearts are gentle Amanda from South Africa (four times), cheerful Birte from Germany (three times), Melanie, from France (our first WVVOOFer), Austrian Thomas, on a break from his new home with the Dalai Lama, sweet Nelly from France, handsome Samuel and Moises, both from Barcelona but at different times, skilled Jenny from the USA, hard-working young Emmanuel from France (twice), quiet but skilled Ina from Germany, bubbly Peter from Hungary, ace horsewoman Katya from Switzerland, lively Udo from Romania, conscientious Marlene from Germany; dreadlocked Lorenzo from Italy; enthusiastic Elsa from Belgium - the list is endless.

Hopefully I have helped them with their English as much as they have helped me with the horses and field maintenance. I acknowledge their contribution on my website: www.gadebrookstud.com and include their photos.

Long live WVVOOFing!

George McMullan, Karuna Bhavan

I am very pleased to report that, although I am a relatively new host of just 19 months, it has been a very worthwhile adventure for our community and for all our visitors. For us it has been an opportunity to make new friends, offer our best hospitality and give many people an experience of living off the land. Even in the coldest time of winter we have had volunteers happily engaged. Many of our WVVOOFers have returned for a second helping and we all look forward to many years of the same.

Mat, Jo, Wilf & Beth, Cooks West Wood

'Cooks West Wood' Farm a.k.a 'Land of Roots' have had the pleasure of working alongside WVVOOFers for the past 7 years. Our veg box scheme, building projects, hens, fencing, tracks, fruit trees and all manner of other things would certainly not have been done the way they have been done without our wonderful WVVOOFers. Our business 'Abundant Earth' cannot survive without them! We are totally indebted to the WVVOOF scheme and all the lovely folk who have blessed us with their time, passion, energy and skills. Every single one of you has brought unique gifts to our project - we would like to take this opportunity to

say a very big THANKYOU to you all! Happy WVVOOFing,

Bryony Huntley, Westfield Farm

I have only been a WVVOOF host for a couple of years but it has been a real godsend, as well as a wonderful adventure for me. I, rather reluctantly, attended a family wedding a month or so after my husband died and it was a complete fluke that at the buffet lunch I happened to sit next to a chap (distantly related) who offered his condolences and sympathised that obviously, now, I was going to need some regular help with our 25 acre smallholding.

I was still in a bit of a daze, and it was January so I rather vaguely agreed. He then said "So do you know about WVVOOF?"

I, of course, thought he was joking and said something silly about not having dogs..... When he started explaining what WVVOOF is I think my jaw must have hit the floor. I honestly couldn't believe that there could be such a wonderful organisation! It was probably one of the most illuminating moments of my life!

Since then we have had a fairly regular stream of WVVOOFers - all with different skills and strengths and recently we have hosted the ideal WVVOOFer - a young American engineer who wanted to see Europe as economically as possible and decided that "There must be an organisation where I can work in return for board and lodging." He put "work on a farm" into Google and ended up on our doorstep! Joy!

Well done to those of you who labour to make it all work and a huge well done to the enlightened founder. I only wish I had known about it when I was a youngster - although I am planning to set off as soon as the farm is ticking over happily!

Sue & Mark, Wimbles Farm

We have only been members for the last 2 years but have been rewarded with meeting delightful, helpful WVVOOFs who have been a huge help in tackling the weeds in the spring and for large projects like our straw eco-building and our alpaca felt-making exercise which subsequently became roof insulation for the straw house - you can check it out on You Tube! As we launch our new website www.experiencesussex.co.uk to encourage visitors to stay longer, all season we will hopefully be able to use more WVVOOF help throughout the year.

Maurice and Denise, Valhalla

We have only been hosting for a few months. However the two helpers that have come (one more than once), have been a great help and a delight. We are very glad we joined!

Mrs. A Laing, Logie House

I just love working with the WVVOOFers who remind us

hosts' birthday wishes

that a slower pace of life has so much to offer. Scrabble, not television; conversation not computers; contentment not aggravation

Christine Dickinson, Old Manor Farm

Me and my husband Keith were hosts back in 1985 and back then we had just English WWOOFers. They generally did not have much money, but were lovely helpful people and sometimes we would help out with clothes, as on more than one occasion they would borrow my sewing box to put their clothes back together. We had a farm shop at that time selling our organic veg.

After quite a gap I started hosting once again after my husband became terminally ill with cancer. Now I have a lot of students from many parts of the world, as well as Britain; without them it would be impossible to carry on with my farm. We now have a music festival every summer to help raise money for Marie Curie and Samantha Dixon brain tumour trust. The WWOOFers enjoy the festival and it gives them the incentive to get the gardens looking good for the fest.

I have many recollections and great times with my WWOOFers; one of them mended the seats on my garden chairs and copied a poem I had written in French on one seat and in English on the other. Inside each individual is a talent sometimes waiting to be discovered. I manage to keep in touch with some previous WWOOFers.

Hilary, Pantyrhedyn

I have been a WWOOF host for 16 years since 1995. I have had 63 WWOOFers over this time and they have all, except one, been totally wonderful. They came from France, Japan, Korea, Australia, Austria, Germany, Sweden, Holland, Switzerland, Italy, Canada, USA, and the UK. I have had babies of 3 months old and toddlers and everyone has been fantastic - I couldn't manage without them. Long live WWOOF!

In the 2 and a bit years we've been hosting we have had very varied, sometimes difficult but usually good experiences. We have had French, German, Austrian, Canadian, French Canadian, Scottish, American, New Zealander, Australian, Japanese, Chinese, Spanish, Ugandan, Italian and many varied English come and stay with us. We always tell my 13 year-old that we cannot take her around the world but I think we have brought a lot of it to her.

Tracey Mason

Although this is only our second year of being WWOOF hosts, I would like to say how much we have enjoyed spending time with all of our WWOOFers. We have met people from Spain, France, Italy, Belgium, America, South Korea and Taiwan. There have been many discussions about politics, lifestyle, cooking and culture and all of them have been most enlightening and enjoyable. We feel all our WWOOFers have become part of our family when they

stay with us and their participation and hard work are so very much appreciated.

Happy 40th birthday WWOOF! I remember my 40th birthday very fondly!

Here's to many more years together.

Rosa Stepanova

We've only been WWOOF hosts for two years, but the help we have received from our WWOOFers since then has been invaluable. We've gone from limping and struggling to skipping and firing on all four cylinders.

What still amazes us is the wide range of skills and qualities WWOOFers bring to our croft, garden, nursery, and plant collection. Here's our brief and as yet incomplete list: supreme thistle, dock and hogweed exterminators, first class cooks, jam, and wine makers, champion washer-uppers, loving orphan lamb mothers/fathers, impeccable weeders, master dry-stone dyke builders, innovative haymakers, fabulous dog and cat entertainers, relentless lawnmowers, dedicated potting-on and potting-uppers, reliable housekeepers and, last but by no means least, perfect and highly tolerant companions in a chaotic household of "owls".

Congratulations on your 40th anniversary and many happy returns.

Wendy, Hafod Elwy Hall

We had the misfortune to be hit by *Phytophthora Ramorum* a sporulating disease that is pure bad luck. We were ordered to fell over 400 larch trees, process them to get the trunk wood under cover, clear the brash and burn it. All within a 9 week period. The trees were not accessible by machine so every bit had to be done by hand. It looked insurmountable but the trusty WWOOFers came galloping in on foot, by camper van, train and car. Every tree was felled, the trunk wood cut, split and stacked under cover, the brash was piled and burned. This was in mud, snow, rain



Tree-mendous efforts at Hafod Elwy Hall.

hosts with the most

Most Urban: Tania and Mike Ross, Tooting Veg, London

Mike and Tania signed up as WWOOF hosts at their home in south London 1 year ago. "We managed to buy an unused piece of land that backs on to our garden, after trying for several years. Six months later we got an allotment – we'd been on the waiting list for 5 years. All this at the same time as having a new baby! My sister-in-law was a WWOOF host in Scotland for a while, and one day we realised that we could do that too."

The house is 10 minutes away from the nearest tube station and 50 minutes from central London. Its urban location seems to be a great draw for WWOOFers. "It's quite rare I think that you can come and WWOOF in an urban setting – we certainly get a lot of requests! Our WWOOFers can spend the morning with us in the garden and head into London in the afternoon. It's a great combination." And they can't imagine swapping their city smallholding for a rural idyll. "We love being able to visit the Tate, or go to see some amazing performance at the Barbican. At the same time, our children learn about where their food comes from and have a chance to get their hands dirty, which I think is very important. We're so lucky that we haven't had to move house in order to grow our own." And being surrounded by people does have its advantages: "One of the neighbours will usually pop in to water things if we go away which is great."

The garden and allotment provide Tania and Mike with most of their food during the summer months and well on into the winter too. Last year's tomato crop kept them going until April this year. "We had to install a new freezer as we just didn't have space to store all our produce." And the WWOOFers bring much more than helping hands: "It's been very stimulating, meeting interesting people who have often done a lot of travelling, something I did when I was younger. And it's lovely sharing our lifestyle with people – it sounds like a cliché, but it's true, they really have just fitted in!"

Tania loves taking good care of their WWOOFers, cooking delicious meals during their stay. "It's something I enjoy doing as it feels like giving back for the effort they put in." And the tricky bits about hosting? "None! We've found that the most important thing is good communication before they arrive, so that they know what to expect."

Tooting Veg are really just at the start of their career as hosts. "I hope that every year I'll become more organised and make good use of the support that we get from WWOOF. Getting our hands on that extra piece of garden has really changed our lives. I would love to think that in the next 40 years, more and more people in our sort of situation will be growing their own produce and that WWOOF will play a big part in spreading that message."

Most Dispersed Host: Ceri and Dave Galloway, Ceri and Dave's Place, Cambridgeshire

Ceri and Dave live in a small council estate on the outskirts of Cambridge. They describe their place as a 'virtual smallholding'. It consists of their 140 foot garden and an allotment plot, plus 4 other community growing projects that they are heavily involved in: an orchard, a chicken cooperative, a hazel coppice and an edible nut planting.

When they moved from London almost 10 years ago they were specifically looking for somewhere with interesting bits of land near by. "Cambridgeshire is London prices, so we couldn't afford to buy the space we wanted in order to be self-sufficient. I thought at the time that we'd end up moving to Scotland, but we've managed to get access to land in other ways."

Ceri gave up her day job in 2006. "I became so concerned about climate change and peak oil that I felt compelled to devote more time to food production." The range of experience now on offer here to would-be WWOOFers is impressive: "There's coppicing, hedge laying, chicken keeping, vegetable growing (in a permaculture style, though we're quite new to that), orchard management, alternative technologies, bee keeping, setting up and running community growing groups – lots! And really importantly, we can show that you don't need to own land to do this."

A certain amount of determination has been required to get the community projects going: "It took 6 years to get our hands on the chicken plots for the cooperative, even though chicken keeping is what the land was always intended for from the start, in 1947! They were lying unused for years. The community orchard took time too; the land was there, unused – potentially threatened by a housing development – when I started meeting regularly with just 1 other woman. Gradually we started pulling in grants to make things happen, and now we often run events and training courses there."

Ceri and Dave are hosting increasing numbers of local, part-time WWOOFers. "One woman lives about 20 miles away and is keen to start her own smallholding. She comes here after dropping her 4 kids off at school in the morning, spends the day with us 'til 3pm, then can be home to meet them after school." They most enjoy passing on their skills and seeing people gain the confidence to go out and do it for themselves. "We love meeting people who share the vision, and who give us their input into what we're doing too."

"Happy Birthday WWOOF!"

the land of ice

Keith Dowell is our Regional Host Contact for the North East. He took some time off from WWOOFing to visit Iceland recently and shares his adventures with us. Iceland has four WWOOF hosts, for details see <http://www.woof.org/independents.asp>

Having completed over 700 days volunteering for BTCV, the UK conservation volunteering charity, my narrow concept of a bonus is an extra biscuit at teatime during a day working on the environment. I was therefore not slow to take an opportunity to visit Iceland, courtesy of an EEC fund for over 50s.

It was a great experience and there have been surprises and adventures a plenty.

I met Christine, a teacher from Colchester and Mary Lou, a retired cleaner from Winsford at Heathrow, the rest of the senior team. My first surprise was to learn that Lou had a mother called Dowell and that we are related.

When we arrived in Iceland Chas the project co-ordinator for the Iceland environment service, UST, told us that Skafafell in the south east was still clogged with ash after a recent eruption earlier this year:

We were sent instead to Thorsmork, near the Myrkdalsjokull glacier, close to the site of the famous 2010 eruption which upset a lot of air passengers. The 6-hour journey along switch back tracks and streambeds was an adventure in itself. Off route one, the 1350 kilometre road around the island, roads consist of ash tracks and river crossings are all fords.

The Thorsmork campsite is dramatically set at the edge of a wide glacial valley, braided with cold glacial torrents, between two towering crags like the gates of Mordor: Iceland actually inspired J.R. Tolkein. We were the first project group to be directed to this site and hopefully not the last.

We met Claire and Anna, volunteer leaders for the next two weeks, a visiting group of six, and three Icelanders who we worked with for the next two weeks. Our ages ranged from 16 to 65. On our first evening we walked up into the striking hills along a tricky scree path and wet our feet in the myriad glacial streams. The shower block was host to some fledgling birds. Some of the power was supplied by a natty mini hydro plant looked after by Inky the ranger: *, a gentle giant of a man. We thought we had spotted a sea eagle but it turned out to be a

seagull. In the mornings the weird humming note of snipe could be heard. Torches were superfluous as the sun merely dipped towards the horizon at 11.30pm then rose again, often with spectacular results in the air affected by recent eruptions of ash. We quickly took the work in hand and completed over 50 log steps, drains, willow-weaved barriers, path covering with wood chips, tool repair and a small board walk bridge. The UST volunteers are the only organisation looking after footpaths in the National park areas of Iceland. Half a million visitors visit Iceland every year, and many of them come to explore the incredible scenery from the wild flowers blooming their socks off in June, July and August to the towering volcanic peaks, the vast glaciers and the northern fjords.

Because of the harsh winters and the glacial spring run off, maintaining the footpaths is a continuous job.

Day 5 was eventful. Jude from Sheffield accidentally spilled scalding water down her legs and was quickly directed to a cold shower. Food supplies were running low. Chris, an experienced cake maker, was whipping through the marg, and account had not been taken of the tea guzzling features of an all British project group. (Usually project trail groups are from a number of different countries). Richard from Bradford was not amused at the possibility of a tea-less day and made big protests. At one point he offered me the use of his daughter for medical research in return for a used tea bag. A special food run from Reykjavik was quickly organised.

The weather was beautiful. Some Icelanders were in bikinis. After dinner I wandered back up the mountain. As I was sitting sketching an arctic fox in summer coat nonchalantly trotted across the path 8 metres away. Other nature highlights included a mouse in the breadbox, later also discovered in a tent.

On our first day off a group climbed toward the site of the 2010 eruption. I went on ahead to sketch a picture and basked in the utter silence of the high mountain. We were rewarded with the site of a lava waterfall and still-hot rocks near the crater. Some wag had left a pizza to cook! We collected lava samples. We should have collected more because we later saw volcanic ash from the site on sale in Reykjavik for £5 a jar! Unfortunately Heather from Edinburgh slipped on a descent and was briefly unconscious. She was helped down the mountain. She also had a cold and coughed so much that she cracked a rib. She was whisked off to Reykjavik for a night's observation in

hospital but insisted on returning to the group.

On Saturday at the campsite the week-enders from Reykjavik arrived and sang songs round the campfire at night. They even persuaded some of us to join in Icelandic dances.

Day 9 was another free day. There was some rain but also sunny intervals, which created magical rainbows throughout the day. I climbed the highest trail, leading to a mountain named after the Ptarmigan, which the Icelanders eat at Christmas.

The path was spectacular and rather exposed. Half way up the trail I discovered an Icelandic woman who said she could not go up or down. She was afraid of heights. Bad place to be. I was just about to escort her down the mountain when her husband appeared from the summit. The weather was cool and windy, but the air was blue! I dragged myself over rocks to the summit and gasped as I looked down on the most complete double rainbow I have ever seen framing the spectacular mountain view. After a long climb I was slightly deflated to see a black Labrador trotting around the summit.

On Day 13 as rain pelted down Lou, age 65, declared she was never going to sleep in a tent again. In fact until this trip she had never been camping! The weather improved and that night some of us used a fixed rope to access a nearby crag with beautiful views across the valley at sunset. The volunteers all took turns cooking dinner: I was a little daunted by two raw legs of lamb, but with the help of some Icelandic campers the meat was pit-roasted to a turn. On our last night a special cake was baked for Claire and Anna in the shape of our step and path work.

Day 14 Chris, Lou and I returned to an apartment in Reykjavik. We were very touched when Inky the ranger and his wife broke off from their duties to see us off. Hugs all round. There were delays because of a large annual pop concert held close to route 1. We sampled soft beds and the city life, including an Africa day, the Blue Lagoon – an amazing milky blue hot spring, jazz recitals, live bar music, whale watching, a visit to the magnificent opera house, the National museum and the Pearl, a former geo-thermal water store. Every house in Reykjavik has geo-thermal heating which is very economical although the showers smell of bad eggs.

We said our goodbyes to the Thorsmork trail team at a local restaurant with more hugs.

WVVOOF AGM & 40th Birthday Celebration

15 to 16 October 2011

Each year WVVOOF has an event in the autumn when the WVVOOF organisers and members come together for a weekend to hold the formal AGM of WVVOOF and to discuss the policies and procedures involved in running WVVOOF. This is your chance to come and hear about some of the recent developments affecting WVVOOF and to influence its future direction.

This year is a special one in WVVOOF's history, as our founder Sue Coppard went WVVOOFing at Emerson College for the first time in 1971. The event is being held at Bore Place, Chiddingstone, Kent. Bore Place is just amazing. It is the home of the Commonwork Centre which comprises an organic dairy farm, a residential centre and a brand new purpose-built educational centre. Bore Place House is itself a Grade 2 listed Tudor/Jacobean mansion and has been adapted for modern use to a very high standard.

Bore Place is also the home of the Grow2Grow project that is being run by Paula Conway due to a successful National Lottery application in WVVOOF's name. This project provides support to young people with mental health problems including care leavers and young offenders. You will see the cabin used to shelter from the elements and the organic market garden created by them. We have booked the whole of the Commonwork facilities for the weekend. It sleeps a maximum number of 50 people. The accommodation is in Bore Place House, the Old Stable and the Small Barn. The rooms are one, two or three bedded – extra beds can be provided for families. All participants are expected to stay at Bore Place – the nearest village is about two miles away.

Directions can be found on the excellent website www.commonwork.org.

If coming by train, there are two options: (a) Sevenoaks: taxis cost £15 – we can put you in touch with fellow travellers to share a taxi. (b) Penshurst: this station is about two miles away – if you ring the landline of Bore Place House on 01732 746502 or the Old Stable on 01732 742435 (do use the Ansaphone) we can come and get you.

Be warned that mobiles do not work at Bore Place, except for Vodafone or in the car park!

The weekend will run from Saturday to Sunday lunchtime. There will be a farm tour after lunch and then the AGM and other meetings. We hope to have a small band playing music for us in the evening. There will be WVVOOFing on the Sunday morning. This should be our best ever event - please come along and bring your energy to help us to celebrate everything that is great about WVVOOF and how it changes people's lives!

The cost is a flat rate £45 per head. Campers pay £30 per person. Concessionary rates are available on application.

Please contact Richard and not Bore Place if you have any difficulties with your booking, e.g. if you wish to cancel or if you have transport difficulties. Be warned that you will lose your booking fee if you cancel less than a week before the event. Please do not contact Bore Place direct to book for this event. They are under strict instructions not to take any bookings. Please DO NOT turn up without having booked, nor ring Richard in the week before the event, begging to be allowed to come, having heard about this event but not having seen this Newsletter!

If you have any problems, contact Richard Hazell, our meetings organiser, on 07904 548042 (do leave a message slowly and clearly - he will ring you back), or send him an email at richard.hazell@wwoof.org. See you in October!

WVVOOF AGM & 40th Birthday Celebration – 15 to 16 October 2011

Names (and ages of children): _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____ Email: _____

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

I would like a lift from _____ area

I want to share a taxi from Sevenoaks station between 12 noon and 1pm Yes/No

I want a lift from Penshurst station and will bring Bore Place House Yes/No

Any dietary requirements/special needs? _____

One, two or three bedrooms (delete which) _____ adults @£45 each

_____ children @£45 each

Camping _____ persons @£30 each

SIGNED: _____

DATE: _____

PLEASE ENCLOSE A CHEQUE PAYABLE TO 'WVVOOF' WITH THE BOOKING FORM

hosts' birthday wishes

and everything a Welsh Mountain can throw at us in winter.

We are so very grateful to those sterling volunteers, it really was beyond any expectations we could have so Agric, Ian, Grant, Stephanie, Chloe, Adrian and everyone else on that long list who came and saw and conquered, a HUGE thank you.

Dave

May I just also transcribe part of an email received from a potential WWOOFer, we felt that this was a beautiful sentiment and way of looking at WWOOFing and should be included in your magazine also.

"....to me, these WWOOFing experiences were very spiritual. The work had become a giving/ a service which transforms me each time in a new way. I felt the sense of being part of something larger. Indeed, the understanding that striving for one self only is limited but if you first put your attention outside yourself and care for your friend/ neighbour, then your need will be taken care of. Everything I asked or wanted was given to me without effort. That I found is sublimely beautiful. Therefore we are seeking opportunities to come back to this type of understanding where intuitively, we know that WWOOFing holds that...."

Happy youngsters exploring opportunities in life force hosts to work harder and think more deeply about their beliefs to explain why they do what they do while making friends with the host's children and animals... everyone benefits! Keep up the good work!

Joan and Derek Jones

We are just coming to the end of our first fortnight with two WWOOFers and we have thoroughly enjoyed it. Our new weedy plot is now looking like a healthy area of fruit and veg and it has been a huge boon to have time to tackle other jobs in the garden - like seed collecting for next year. We think our WWOOFers have had a good time and they may visit in the future to see how their efforts have been rewarded. Thanks for a splendid organisation which creates such effective networking.

Juliette Lowe

One of my best WWOOFing memories is of making such good friends with a delightful Australian couple that they came back 6 months later after WWOOFing with us in the summer, in the depth of winter, to help look after me, my then toddler, house

and garden when I gave birth to my second daughter. One was an amazing chef, he took over the cooking and even left home-made pastry cases in the freezer for us when they left. We are still in touch after 12 years and every 6th December, on my daughter's birthday, I remember them and thank them from my heart for all their help.

Debbie

We have only been WWOOF hosts for 1 year and a bit and have had only 6 WWOOFers, all of which have been interesting and hard working and taught us something new. Our most wonderful memory is of a San Franciscan lady called Kate sitting on top of the bank playing her flute in summer after clearing comfrey all morning, and as we are at the back of a railway station all the passengers on the railway platform stopping chatting and listening to her lovely improvised tunes!! Made us smile as the people on the platform couldn't see her through the trees .

Happy 40th!

Keasts, Devon

It's when young people we've hosted contact us again about their future and plans and we've even been invited to people's first home in Devon following their WWOOF with us. Absolutely love welcoming people from other countries and sharing food and cultures.

Chris Main, The Green House

Had a great many WWOOFers over the last 3 years, from all over the World. We've had some really great times with them out in boats, bbq's on beaches, etc, on our beautiful coast and we've got quite a lot of work in the garden done too! All the WWOOFers we've had have always kept in touch and have all enjoyed their adventures with us in the West.



Sunset from the Green House Deck

the classifieds

Classified ads are now free up to 50 words at the editor's discretion. WVVOOF 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.

Forming ecohamlet seek others with capital to buy in SW Wales. We are two households (30s couple, mum in 60s) looking to buy a farm/smallholding/land with others in Carmarthanshire, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire. We will base it on permaculture principles. Have capital available. Seeking households in similar position. Email Adam on morwenna0@gmail.com

virgin.net. or 01852 500240 for more details

Australian horticulturist would like to contribute to an organised, commercial community which is committed to sustainability. WVVOOF ID 52741, chapmangiles@yahoo.com

Farm apprenticeship available in Orkney. Suit experienced WVVOOFer seeking career in agriculture. All aspects of general farming, plus SVQ or postgrad diploma possible. Modest wage and accommodation for one practical, organically minded person keen to learn animal husbandry at trumland Farm on beautiful Rousay. Contact trumland@btopenworld.com

Long-term WVVOOFing opportunity on established organic vegetable farm in South Wales UK. We grow produce in several large 50m polytunnels and on 10 acres of land for local box schemes. We have been taking WVVOOFers for 10 years. We need help this summer. Please ring 01558 668088 or email: Organics2go@googlemail.co.uk

Opportunity to learn about market gardening. Live and work at our organic market garden on the west coast of Scotland from April - October 2012. Find out about all methods of growing vegetables on a small but commercial scale. Food and Accomodation provided plus small wage. Contact lix.armstrong@

Room wanted in community / shared house near Ashburton, Devon. I'm 43, male, non-smoker. I've been a WVVOOFer for several years, and am now going to college in Ashburton to study cooking. Please contact rhastings99@gmail.com

WVVOOF HOST AWARD WINNER

The evening of Friday, 27th May, saw the presentation of the Nile African Development / African International Achievers Awards 2011 at a festive ceremony, with music, buffet and speeches, held at the Hilton Hotel, Bradford. You'll be delighted to learn that Cameroonian WVVOOF Independents host 'Farmer Tantoh' (Dieudonne Tantoh Nforba) was one of the recipients. This was a richly deserved tribute in recognition of Tantoh's organisation SYFA (Save Your Future Association), which he set up in 2003 to rescue the environment by promoting sustainable, organic agriculture, and runs with idealistic and single-minded perseverance.

After the presentations the award winners each told us something of their projects, and most inspiring it was; for instance: combating jiggers (hideous tiny creatures that burrow into your feet and hands to lay their eggs - the results are horrifying); and fighting for education and a fair deal and leadership courses for African girls. Tantoh ended his own account by stressing how important it is that everybody who cares about the planet should help in whatever they can, even if it's only a little. I have to say he looked extremely colourful in his traditional African tunic and trousers!



During the milling and networking session before the close of the evening I met quite a few other exceptional people, who were very enthusiastic when I told them about WVVOOF and handed them brochures. WVVOOF has played no small part supporting Tantoh as many of the WVVOOFers from different countries who visited him have contributed know-how, helping him set up a website, apply for grants and other assistance, make a video, construct wooden beehives, visit water conservation schemes in Tibet, India and California, and finally study organic agriculture for a year in the States. When you have 20 minutes to spare do watch his excellent Youtube: 'Farmer Tantoh talks about SYFA organisation' and google his informative website: Save Your Future Association + Cameroon.

Sue Coppard

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