

WWOOF UK NEWS

world wide opportunities on organic farms

issue 238

spring 2013

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www.woof.org.uk

editorial

Welcome to the Spring 2013 edition of the WWOOF UK newsletter

It's always hugely comforting during the long winter nights to be putting the spring issue of the newsletter together. It reminds me of brighter days and gives me much to look forward to. The articles in this issue are packed with energy and opportunity – seize the day! Well, put the kettle on and read the newsletter first.

It really feels like a momentous year for organic farming in the UK, with the launch of Via Campesina UK. Details about how you can get involved and support the movement are on page 7. It can only be a good thing to have stronger international grassroots farming links, a point that Chris Smaje makes so eloquently in his report back from the Oxford Real Farming conference on pages 4 & 5.

If that's got you all fired up, there's plenty of organic news and action to take on pages 6 & 7 including a link to WWOOF UK's facebook and twitter. If you can, do log on and connect with the online world of WWOOF. There is always fresh, positive news being posted – just what we need to hear to ready us for another year in the fields, woods, gardens and kitchens.

Here's to brighter days,

Alissa

write to us

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

30th April for Summer 13 issue

31st July for Autumn 13 issue

31st October for Winter 13 issue

31st January for Spring 14 issue

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

We would particularly welcome your letters and photographs as well as your WWOOFing tales.



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

news from the office

Every year the WWOOF UK team imagine there is going to be a quiet period during the winter months, when hosts and WWOOFers go into hibernation and leave us to get on with sorting ourselves out and catching our breath after the previous, frantic year. And funnily enough it hasn't happened yet.

So January and February have seen us gloriously inundated with applications from people who want to become hosts; some of whom have been WWOOFers themselves and taken that exciting next step, some who have found out about us through neighbours and friends and others who encounter us first through presentations at local events and realise what they have been missing. It's great to hear their stories and to support them as they settle into their new life as a host. Our Host Contact, Taryn Field, has been a host herself for 10 years and is able to offer very practical help and advice to new, returning and continuing hosts. BUT we are always looking for more hosts. With currently over 5400 WWOOFers on our books we know we need extra hosts who are willing to share their enthusiasm and experience of

the organic, sustainable lifestyle. You don't have to own a FARM to be a WWOOF host – you could have a large garden or nursery or be at the very beginning of making one. Our basic criteria for hosts are that a key part of your lifestyle or organisational mission should be:

- the production of food or other products derived from the natural world
- the management of land in an environmentally sustainable way
- an activity supporting organic growing

And you should follow the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movement's (IFOAM) organic principles – there are more details here on our website www.wwoolf.org.uk/information_for_potential_hosts

So that we can spread the word about WWOOF as far as possible we are currently setting up events to attend in the coming months, and trying to find out about others we can supply information about WWOOF to. So if you have a local Green Fair

or Festival you think might like to know about us, or you would like to volunteer to help us please tell us using info@wwoolf.org.uk.

In the Winter 2012 issue of this newsletter we told you that our host visitor book had been set up so that WWOOFers can leave comments about their stay for other WWOOFers to read and enjoy. It's an optional facility and hosts see every comment before they are published – so far 17% of hosts have opted in. And that's great, but could be better. If you are a host and would like some help or a reminder about how to enable your visitor book please contact hosts@wwoolf.org.uk.

The next feature we are developing for the website is a WWOOFer profile. This will include photos and lots of details about each WWOOFer (if they decide to complete it) and will be available, to start with, for hosts to search for WWOOFers with particular skills, to find out more about WWOOFers who have applied to visit them and to read comments left by hosts they have visited already. We don't have a precise timescale for this just yet as it is a work in progress but it will be soon so watch this space.

growing employment

At a time when unemployment is high we have been wondering if WWOOF, in partnership with employment centres, could facilitate volunteers getting work experience. It seems this idea captures some zeitgeist because we have recently been contacted by two volunteers interested in putting this suggestion to their Jobcentre Plus advisors. It appears to be a perfect match because WWOOFing is entirely voluntary; there's no contract and hours can be negotiated

to suit the exchange, so you are completely free to go to interviews. Self-esteem - which has been shown to suffer in those unemployed - is increased, and you are outside keeping fit and getting fresh air which has also shown to improve well-being. You're learning new skills and are therefore more employable, plus a voluntary role could even lead to paid work. In addition to all this, WWOOF UK is a well-respected registered charity of 42 years standing.

As this newsletter goes to press we are still waiting for the outcome of these two cases, but we'd be very interested to hear about anyone else interested or thinking along similar lines, whether you are a volunteer, host, or especially if you know someone who works for a Jobcentre.

Please get in touch by emailing scarlett@wwoolf.org.uk

Scarlett Penn

real farming

Chris Smaje reports back from The Oxford Real Farming Conference.

The Oxford Real Farming Conference held its fourth annual get together in Oxford early in January. It was my third year at the event – it's starting to feel like the place I just have to be every year once the Hogmanay hangover is done, and judging by the crowds this year a lot of other people feel the same.

The conference was the brainchild of the agriculture writers Colin Tudge and Graham Harvey, who cunningly borrowed the conference dates and most of its name from the mainstream Oxford Farming Conference which occurs simultaneously each year just across the road. While the latter was graced by the likes of Secretary of State Owen Paterson and erstwhile environmentalist Mark Lynas, cheerleading for the latest onslaught of GM interests against the ongoing EU ban to an audience of policymakers, industrialists and NFU types, the ORFC had the more homespun feel of a counter-movement in the making, peopled by food activists, land activists and above all farmers. In a sector renowned for its ageing and often somewhat demoralised workforce, it was especially pleasing to meet a lot of enthusiastic young people determined to take up the profound challenges facing the food and farming sector in the 21st century.

It's a little hard to convey the diversity of the conference sessions – and as is often the case at such events, some of

the most illuminating moments came in snatched corridor conversations with old friends and new acquaintances. There were various different sessions running in parallel; I kept mostly to the 'New Generation, New Ideas' stream – a set of smaller, more informal sessions in which small-scale farmers and market gardeners predominated, but there was still space enough to discuss a whole raft of things – urban marketing models for local food, new developments in GM campaigning, research on small farm productivity, campaigning for farmer access to land, and thoughts on how to farm for the landless, an inspirational account of farming traditional grain varieties, and political discussions about the future of the food system.

There was much besides that I missed, but would have liked to have heard – including a whole set of 'Farm Day' presentations that focused mostly on larger scale livestock farming and soil health issues, and a 'Perspectives on 2013' session encompassing

food for thought. Full details of the programme can be found on the ORFC website at www.oxfordrealfarmingconference.org.

The conference also saw the launch of various new initiatives: Via Campesina UK, the Agroecology Alliance, Food Sovereignty UK, and the Sustainable Food Trust. I'm particularly excited about the formation of a UK branch of Via Campesina – the international peasant and small farmer movement – because it's a genuine global grassroots movement focused on the concerns of actual producers, rather than being a vehicle for the usual talking head experts and lobbyists, however well meaning. I'd like to encourage WWOOF host producers or WWOOFers who are actively seeking a land-based producer lifestyle to attend the inaugural AGM at Ruskin Mill Farm on 3 March – details are at www.viacampesina.org.uk.

The emergence of all these initiatives is probably a healthy sign that more people are beginning to think more seriously about the problems in the global food system, and are coming to similar conclusions about how to tackle them. But there may also be a danger that too many initiatives and organisations with overlapping objectives are being formed, with the consequent danger of dividing forces and losing energy

in boundary demarcation or internecine disputes. Perhaps there are historical lessons to be learned from the mistakes of progressive politics in becoming too concerned with internal differentiation to keep an eye



a range of issues, including ways of improving local food marketing systems, developing Community Supported Agriculture projects and bringing more financial backing into sustainable agriculture. Much

on the real issues at hand. Hopefully, the Oxford Real Farming Conference can become a major vehicle for bringing the whole disparate sustainable farming movement together and help to mitigate this danger. If this year is anything to go by, there are certainly signs that it's increasingly playing this role and building up a head of steam.

One issue that I know concerns a good number of people is the conference name – by calling it 'real' farming, do we alienate sections of the mainstream farming community who might otherwise be sympathetic? As someone who has been told by planning officers and other such types that I'm not a 'real farmer' I must admit that I secretly enjoy reclaiming the phrase for the kind of farming that I do, and indeed I think it's important that we take the term 'farming' back from something that is only used for people with big tractors and large arable acreages and apply it to anybody who so much as plants a few herbs in an inner city window box. However, I do recognise the problem, and in my experience there are many farmers who feel somewhat trapped within conventional high input methods who might lend their support to many aspects of the movement coalescing around the ORFC and its parent,

the Campaign For Real Farming, so long as it doesn't set its stall out too much in opposition to them.

Talking of arable acreages, it's the arable farmers who were most notable by their absence from the ORFC, with most other sectors of small and large scale farming represented to a greater or lesser degree. But it was gratifying to



see that there were at least a few large-scale, 'conventional' arable farmers in attendance who were willing to say that the emperor has no clothes when it comes to many of the blandishments being offered to them by the biotech and agribusiness sectors. Equally if we 'real' farmers expect to be taken seriously, we have to show that we're capable of meeting the challenge of producing the

food and fibre that the world needs, and that we can't just be dismissed as specialist 'niche' providers. I'd argue that this is something we probably can demonstrate, but we have a lot more work to do, and how best to carry it forward isn't straightforward. A problem here is that government policies and research investment priorities generally favour large scale input intensive farming over small scale input light farming, so currently we lack a level playing field for the appropriate evaluative research. One pleasing aspect of the conference was to learn that there are researchers who are actively addressing this issue. Another was that although the conference rightly provides a forum for railing at the manifold injustices and inadequacies of the existing food system, it's not merely oppositional. We need to acknowledge the difficulties which 'real' farming confronts and then move on, building as best we can a broad and inclusive movement of consumers, researchers, activists and – above all – farmers to try to construct a more just and more sustainable food system of the future. Despite the already venerable history of organic ideals it still feels like this movement is in its infancy, but I think the ORFC is likely to be a crucial player in helping it to grow.

news from the east region

I attended a Christmas Fair organised by Norwich Green Party. Many green and alternative groups were represented and we - myself and some French WWOOFers who were staying at the time – had a great time chatting about WWOOF to lots of interested people and giving out publicity materials.

As well as many people who had WWOOFed in the past and a few current WWOOFers it was surprising how many people knew about WWOOFing and had "always meant to do it" - let's hope we have inspired them to try it next year!

Steve Mahoney

RHC for the East Region



organic news

The One Year Total Wild Food Experiment

Fergus Drennan is an experienced forager working with wild plants as a gateway for exploring issues connected with sustainability, ecology, mental and physical health, spirituality, creativity, and life purpose. He intends to carry out a personal, social, psychological, ecological and spiritual experiment documenting the experience of living on 100% wild foraged food for an entire year. Find out more here

www.indiegogo.com/one-year-total-wild-food

Home grown Grains

It is actually possible to grow your own grains on a small scale if you grow the right varieties. Real Seeds has some great information and Amaranth and Quinoa seeds via www.realseeds.co.uk/grains.html

Plantlife is asking children of all ages to help put together a 'virtual meadow'. For more information visit the 'Bee Scene' page at www.wildaboutplants.org.uk

Natural Beekeeping

As mentioned in the last issue of the newsletter, The Sun Hive was officially launched



in Britain last summer at the Natural Beekeeping Alliance Conference at Emerson College, Sussex. Based on an ingenious combination of skep baskets made of rye straw and wooden support structures, the hive is intended for installation at a height of at least 2.5 metres (8 feet). The shape of the hive harmonises with the movement gesture of the bee colony and enables the bees to design their brood nests according to their own innate criteria. The hive was designed by German sculptor Guenther Mancke, and represents the fruits of many years of research into the nature of the honeybee colony. Regular two-day workshops to make the Sun Hives are held at Emerson College in Forest Row, East Sussex. The next is on 9th March. For details see www.naturalbeekeepingtrust.org or call or call 01342 822101

Future Growers

The Soil Association's Future Growers scheme provides comprehensive training in organic horticulture, with participants working alongside organic experts who are passionate about training the next generation and passing on their skills and knowledge. Farm-based work is combined with a series of structured seminars to build upon the practical knowledge gained out in the field. They are now offering a shorter, six month traineeship where trainees can learn the basics of organic growing and decide whether they wish to take it further. All apprentices and trainees are paid a standard minimum wage. Find out more: apprenticeship@soilassociation.org. Call Rachel Harries on 0117 987 4601 www.soilassociation.org/futuregrowers

End Ecocide in Europe

Please sign this European Citizens' Initiative: End Ecocide in Europe: A Citizens' Initiative to give the Earth Rights. (You must be over 18 and live in Europe.) The aim is to get over a million signatures by next January and require the EU parliament to consider it.

www.endecocide.eu

GM News

GM Watch has reported that The European Commission doesn't plan to give the green light to new genetically modified crops in the coming months, as it wants first an agreement on the draft legislation that would allow member governments to decide individually whether to grow or ban GM plants. The draft rules proposed by the European Commission in 2010 were meant to unblock EU decision-making on genetically modified crops, by allowing some countries to use the technology while letting others impose cultivation bans. But opposition from France, Germany, and Britain has prevented agreement on the proposals, which must be approved by a majority of governments and the European Parliament before becoming law. www.gmwatch.org

Watch WWOOF

A beautiful little video made by Fabio Vázquez Higuera sharing the wonders of WWOOFing. Filmed at Yarde Oak in Somerset and featuring some lovely homemade music at the end. <http://vimeo.com/49261147>

Treesisters

Imagine a global network of women working together to accelerate the greening of our planet through feminine values, energy and leadership. This is

TreeSisters! Their mission is to help reforest the tropics within 10 years, through the combined love, courage, creativity and brilliance of women everywhere. To inspire the creation of a global network of proactive Mothers, Grandmothers and Daughters working together to help accelerate rates of global reforestation and the shift towards a sustainable world.

www.treesisters.org

Wild Relationships

The University of Glasgow is now recruiting to a cutting-edge interdisciplinary masters course: Environment, Culture and Communication, which is concerned with the relationships we hold with our 'wild' environments, and how these evolved.

www.gla.ac.uk/postgraduate/taught/ironmentculturecommunication

IF Campaign

The world produces enough food for everyone, but not everyone has enough food. We can make 2013 the beginning of the end for global hunger. Share this film and demand that world leaders take action.

<http://youtu.be/Xi38ZtG4NhM>

www.enoughfoodif.org

WWOOF Canada short video competition

And the winner is...Carla Steele, WWOOFing at Laughing Stock Farm in British Columbia Watch here:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=5yhEfDOMUlg

Enter WWOOF Sweden film competition

"Describe what WWOOF is to you and what it can do for the future of sustainable agriculture". This is the theme

of a short film competition being run by WWOOF Sweden about volunteering in this lovely country.

More details here:

www.wwoof.se/about/video-contest/

Recent questions from the WWOOF UK Facebook fan page – log on and help us answer!

www.facebook.com/wwoofuk

"Does anyone have experienced with blind WWOOFers or of WWOOFing when blind?"

"Has anyone ever had any experience WWOOFing with a cat?"

"I'm looking for hosts anywhere in the UK who speak Scottish Gaelic"

Follow WWOOF UK on Twitter @wwoofuk

via campesina uk launch

UK co-ordination of the international farming organisation La Via Campesina to be launched.

On March 3rd 2013 the inaugural annual general meeting of the international farming organisation La Via Campesina UK will be held at Ruskin Mill Farm, Gloucestershire, marking the launch of the organisation's first UK-wide co-ordination.

La Via Campesina was founded in 1993 to represent the rights of small-scale traditional food producers around the world. Today the organisation represents more than 400 million farmers, growers, pastoralists and fishermen and campaigns for their rights to be recognised by national and international policies.

Via Campesina UK is a coalition of producers meaning that

membership is open to anyone who is actively involved in farming, fishing or fibre enterprises. The co-ordination will bring together like-minded producers to identify and organise targeted campaigns and lobby UK and European parliaments on issues affecting the livelihoods of small-scale producers. The organisation will also provide a network for producers to share farming skills and knowledge through on-farm training, tours and working groups.

Central to Via Campesina's identity is the campaign for Food Sovereignty launched in 1996 and defined as – "The right of communities to define their own food and farming systems". In practice food sovereignty describes the way farm shops, farmers' markets and local box-schemes already connect producers and consumers across the UK today. While many farmers

are associated with existing unions in the UK, Via Campesina is unique in offering a direct link to the activities and experiences of like-minded producers across Europe, and the rest of the world.

The AGM to be held in March is open to anyone who identifies with the principles of food sovereignty and would like to find out more about the proposed work of Via Campesina UK. The AGM is an all-day event starting at 9am, it is free to attend but booking is essential. Please contact membership secretary Jyoti Fernandes to book a place: viacampesinauk@aktivix.org

For more information visit:

www.viacampesina.org.uk

Ed. We realise the AGM date is very close to the newsletter publication date but wanted to include this news nonetheless.

glebelands city growers

Charlotte Mason tells how WWOOFing gave her the confidence and skills to take on Glebelands Market Garden.

I met Ed and Sally for the first time one Manchester morning in November 2008. A few hours later we piled into a smart solicitors office - anoraks, rucksacks, wellies and all – and formed a new business together, the Glebelands City Growers Co-operative. Our mission was to take on an existing market garden from its two experienced founders, Adam York and Lesley Bryson, who were passing it on to us as a going concern in order to begin a new project in Wales. Seven years before, they had transformed the derelict 2.7 acre patch of land on the banks of the Mersey into an inspirational example of sustainable urban food production and a source of fresh local organic veg for Unicorn Grocery in South Manchester.

I first WWOOFed at Glebelands Market Garden in the spring of 2008. After a year spent on crofts and communities in the Highlands, Islands and Essex-Suffolk borders I had gained a new-found confidence in my

capabilities and a desire to earn a living from the land, fanciful though it might have seemed. Small-scale, urban farming was the logical model for the future I decided, and Glebelands was the perfect place to see it in action. The community of supportive and dedicated individuals that I met in this small corner of Manchester made me feel that anything was possible. One of them was Adam Rayne, a seasonal worker at the market garden. Here was an ex-WWOOFer with many enchanting if implausible tales to tell of his adventures in Australia, New Zealand, Wales and the South-West. We spent many long but happy hours out in the field developing our skills in planting, harvesting, hoeing and chattering. Once it became apparent that Adam York and Lesley were on the move however, our conversations became hushed and conspiratorial. Could we do it we wondered? Could we possibly be capable of taking on the back-breaking workload, logistical complexities and all-consuming responsibilities of a market garden ourselves? It seemed pretty unlikely, but completely irresistible. We eventually summoned enough

courage to face the pair of them and asked, in tremulous voices, if they would ever consider passing Glebelands on to us? Instead of laughing at the sheer hilarity of the idea, they appeared to take us completely seriously, whilst sagely pointing out that there's strength in numbers and mightn't we look for some other fools to join us? At about the same time, Ed and Sally were 200 miles away in Bath, reacclimatising after many months of WWOOFing abroad, and on the hunt for a new challenge. They saw our ad and got in touch. We met, had some breakfast and talked. Then we went to the solicitors and set up a business. A Steep Learning Curve began.

Incredibly, with plenty of determination and start-up funds from Unicorn Grocery, the Co-op and the Local Food Fund, we made it work. Drawing upon Adam and Lesley's wealth of knowledge and our own WWOOFing experiences, we established a strong foundation of market gardening skills and quickly built upon them. WWOOF also gave us a realistic idea of the hard graft that awaited us and, by approaching our many day-to-day challenges in a spirit of co-operation and friendship; we soon became a close team. Four seasons on, and with the help of three new polytunnels, a Massey 35 and an expanding and supportive customer base, we're showing that successful and sustainable urban food production is still a reality that can and should be replicated.

After four years, Ed and Sally are now moving on. We'll miss them, but are excited about the future of Glebelands and are looking for a new member to join the team. If you want to know more, have a look at our website www.glebelandscitygrowers.co.uk



book reviews

The No-Work Garden Book UK edition

By Ruth Stout and Richard Clemence

First published in 1971, this book is a collection of articles published in the American 'Organic Gardening and Farming' magazine over a fifteen year period. In it, Ruth Stout (then 80 years 'young') writes a very personal and frank account of how and why she keeps her garden the way she does.

As she says in her title this is the 'No-Work Garden'. Ruth enjoys sowing and harvesting and doesn't count that as work, but she largely expelled the rest from her system. She threw away her spade and hoe, stopped watering and digging 'in' manure and 'out' couch grass and instead applied a heavy mulch of hay and straw and sprinkles it with some alfalfa meal from time to time. She cut the days and weeks she spent doing labour every year down to a few hours throwing dead grass around.

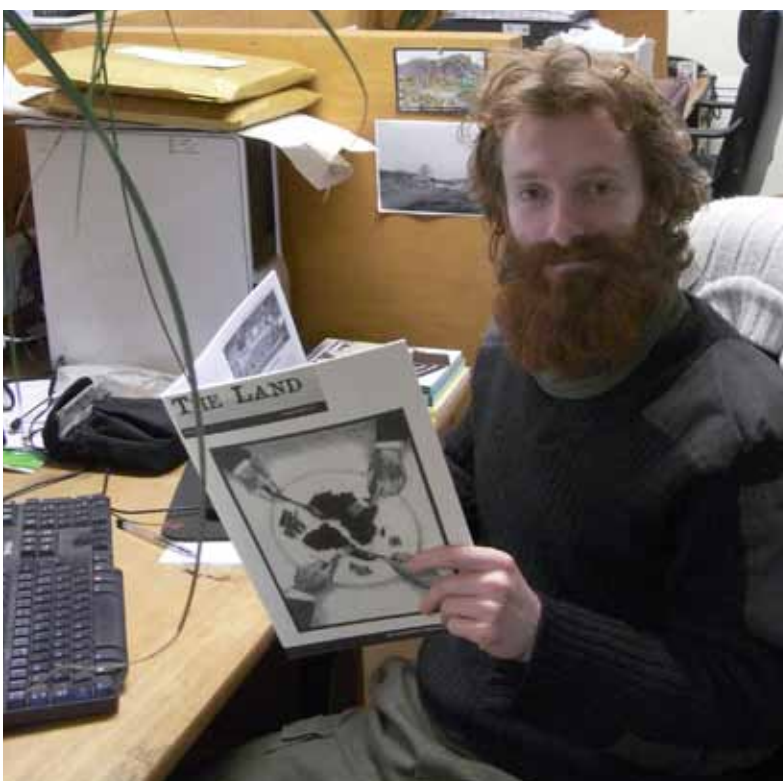
Richard has the final chapter and gives variations on Ruth's 'Year round mulch' system with a more professional angle.

She has an inspiring 'can do' attitude and I recommend it for anyone with any fear of taking action. You will be outside with your sleeves rolled up and your

hands in the soil before you have finished the first page.

In his new book James Wong declares that we are stuck in a 1940's gardening time warp, Ruth was a pioneer and my next book brings things up to date...

P.s. You may also like James Gunston's 1960 book, *Successful gardening without digging*.



Teaming with Microbes revised edition

By Jeff Lowenfels and Wayne Lewis

I could keep this as short as 'READ THIS BOOK... NOW!'

Again, this book is from the other side of the Atlantic, I believe it has the potential to do for soil science what Brian Cox has done for astronomy. This book has changed the way I garden, has made me much more bold in my

experiments and helped me take one more step in realising that 'my' plot, really isn't 'my' plot, it's the bit of Earth I find myself growing food on and sharing with millions of other organisms.

To balance those statements a little I do also have to say I became a bit tired of the repetitive promotion of their company, but that is small in comparison to what I have taken away after reading it.

The first half has a chapter each for all the groups of micro-organisms in the soil (Bacteria, Fungi, Protozoa, Earthworms etc...) and outlines their roles in a very impressive scientific but approachable manner. The second half then goes into detail about how to work or 'team' up with them to manage your garden.

In contrast to the first book, you may think twice before putting your hands in the soil again, I certainly look much closer and with more reverence at the soil under my finger nails at the end of the day.

Whatever you are reading at the moment I hope it is filling you with the sort of inspiration I found from these authors. I recommend supporting your local library and 'mostly' buying second hand and from your local independent shop.

James Dennis

write to us:

email: editor@WWOOF.org.uk

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up the diggers

A woodland on the former Brunel University's Campus, unused because of stalled plans by a private developer to build luxury houses, has been home to the Runnymede Diggers since June 2012. Heavily into land rights, the group say of themselves "We have one call: every person in this country and the world should be free to live on the disused land, to grow food and to build a shelter and live together in community. This should be the case whether you have money or not. We say that no country can be considered free, until people are free to live on the disused land."

Ed Morriss took advantage of their eco-village open day and made his way to Surrey to find out more.

In ironically close proximity to the Magna Carta monument to democracy and freedom under

attempt to sustain – an eco-village, in the face of general disapprobation and legal action from local authorities.

I was invited by a friend to visit, and enjoyed an afternoon and evening at Runnymede in the company of the Diggers, a few of whom I have met before others complete, although mostly friendly, strangers. Having made my roundabout way to the edge of the woods bordering the campus I found the eco-village that the group are in the process of constructing. At this point it comprises a collection of some twenty or so makeshift shelters ranging from simple tarp and bough bivouacs, to canvas tipis and yurts. Colourful dots of habitation scattered within the trees and wooded hillside. Dwellings, punctuated here and there with fragments of commercial shipping logos where a truck tarp forms a roof

and you ought to know that there is nothing quite so welcome after pitching through steep, sodden and unfamiliar woodland toward an uncertain destination, as being greeted with friendly faces, hot tea and a fire. So drying out for a time in Geo Tom's magnificently constructed willow pole geodome covered with truck tarps and warmed by a large paving slab and cob fireplace was a good opportunity to meet a few of the people involved with occupying and developing this eco-village: Eddie and Dan, Keith, Vinni a few of the names that come back to me now.

What struck me initially was the energy and intelligence of the people. Let's not forget that this is a small community of twelve or fifteen people who have been living in makeshift accommodation for months, evicted three times by the



law, is a large tract of woodland surrounding part of the Brunel University Campus, part of which is currently occupied by the 2012 diggers group. Styling themselves on the Gerrard Winstanley's True Levellers, they are a group of people unified in their contempt for global capitalism and the exploitation and destruction of natural resources. The courage of these combined convictions has bought them together at Runnymede to create – and

or wall, contrast vividly with the leaf mould and damp, dripping denuded ash, willow and oak of a muddy and rather majestic winter woodland.

At the heart of the camp is a sixteen foot round geodome and a partly constructed cob and straw longhouse wreathed in wood smoke. A welcoming bunch of unfamiliar faces at first, offered tea and a warm dry place to sit out of the persistent rain

Authorities and at this time facing approaching winter after one of the wettest summers certainly in my memory. I have lived in fields and woodland long enough to appreciate the temerity requisite for comfortable living in this climate, without the ever present threat of eviction. Much talk was devoted to the practicalities of living in this way a short distance from London's conurbation, among others were accounts given of projects such

as the channelling of the small spring, vegetable gardens and along with this subject proposals for relocation due to lack of sunlight in the woods; green woodworking, the construction of the longhouse kitchen from cob and straw. Then on to stories of the legal battles and passionately relayed accounts of the peaceful resistance of evictions, the ignorance and aggression of various bailiff's, accounts also, of course, of the wit and resource of the valiant defenders.

Later on enjoying plates of warm dahl, rice and freshly baked bread along with the thirty or so other gently steaming guests, it was a pleasure to hear the tales of the Diggers, the exploits of Winstanley and the history of the Magna Carta relayed by Royal Holloway's Professor Justin Champion. And the beginnings of a detailed account of planning law and the legal standpoints of local authorities by Land Magazine's editor Mike Hannis. Not so well received by one or two of the older members of the group this talk meandered into a relatively heated debate involving a group of four or five advocates of John Harris's

freeman ideologies. Cries of "Lawful rights to land!" and "We don't consent to be governed!" were countered by Mike's appeal to understand the official mind, all seemed to be resolved, at length, by the commonly shared aim of subverting the enemy's rhetoric.

Later still, a lot of fireside talk, music, poetry; a little nonsense, drunkenness and shenanigans. I came away as impressed by the craft, intelligence and humour of my fellow human beings. Grace

under pressure, attitude and endurance in adversity.

It is rightly stated that there can be no passengers on spaceship earth, only crew. Sadly there are currently too many passengers. These people however are definitely crew. Up the Diggers!

More information about the Runnymede Diggers can be found online at www.diggers2012.wordpress.com



Nettle Soup

Ingredients:

- 3 large carrier bags of nettles,
- 2 large potatoes
- 1 onion or leek
- 2 cloves of garlic
- 1 litre marigold stock
- a slosh of single cream

Pick only the tips of young fresh nettles.



For a delicious soup cook all the ingredients together in a large pan. Then at the last minute, add the nettles and cook until soft. Blend or leave chunky, whichever is your taste.

In this recipe I used the last of the stored pumpkins to make a velvety pumpkin soup and served half with the nettle soup to welcome Spring.

classifieds

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Lower Shaw Farm Friendly events from only £96 – all inclusive! Mosaics, Yoga, Massage, Textile Crafts, Willow Baskets, Permaculture Course, Foraging, Sauna building, Positive Ageing, Herbal Medicine, Family Breaks, Circus Skills, Cookery School, and more. Lower Shaw Farm, Swindon, SN5 5PJ 01793 771080 www.lowershawfarm.co.uk enquiries@lowershawfarm.co.uk

Courses at Karuna (WWOOF host) Permaculture Design Course (residential) 11-24 July, Scything May 18, Permaculture in 3 days 26-28 July. You can WWOOF before or after courses at this beautiful and diverse 18 acre low impact project. Full details at www.karuna.org.uk or contact Janta 01694 751374 merav66@hotmail.com

Opportunity for individual who may like to help to start a small herb/garden/flower nursery in Pembrokeshire (nr. Tenby) Accommodation may be available. Please phone for details, or leave message and give me your email. Tel 07977210250 or 01834810157

Blackdown Yurts set in an ANOB, urgently seeking long-term skilled couples, or individuals from February 2013, mobile home and food provided. Suited to those happy to work on all areas of our non-livestock smallholding and yurt site - maintenance skills preferred and gardening skills essential. Please contact Rebecca at rebeccaharley@me.com

Help required April-October on 2 acres of medicinal herbs in Somerset. Accommodation and a food allowance of £70/week given. Work includes propagation, harvesting, processing and general maintenance of the herbs. Horticultural experience needed. Contact Sarah: sarahw@organicherbtrading.com

Experience life on a small Welsh hill farm in Pembrokeshire with a menagerie of animals. Short/long term WWOOFers any age, any sex, warmly welcomed. Tel 01239 820432

Chef, experienced in cooking for large numbers, specialising in healthy, hearty, organic food. Experienced in vegetable growing and a qualified homeopath. Available to work in return for countryside accommodation for me and my partner (also a chef and currently studying/available to help WWOOF part time). All areas (particularly the south) considered. We are a young, fit and willing couple looking for a way to move to the countryside. Contact Poppy on 07988777057

Want to tackle the root causes of climate change? Join us "WWOOFing with teeth" at radical political growing projects. It's all non-hierarchically organised by Reclaim the Fields, a food autonomy and land rights activist network. See wwolfing.wordpress.com for free volunteering opportunities or to sign up as a host.

Unique Opportunity at Award Winning Centre. Estate Worker needed now to help maintain grounds and organic kitchen gardens. Responsibility for care of smallholding animals. Applicant should have a passion for the environment. Experience in horticulture essential. Permanent position. email programmes@millonthebrue.co.uk or call Rachel Leese: 01749812307

Room to rent in lovely peaceful wilderness home not too far from Hereford or Ross on Wye. I was a WWOOF host but I am not doing any farming at the moment so this would be a cash transaction. Ideal creative retreat. Bring your horse if it can live out. Vivien Ray 01981 580577

50 year old male, plumber/electrician/light builder loves green or conventional construction WWOOFed in UK and US years ago. Seeks projects and placements. More info at www.hoveplumber.co.uk/craig/

What IS the food produced from forest gardening ACTUALLY like to eat? I am looking to WWOOF with any host that can show me what forest gardening is like, from the dinner plate first! hard-working practical chap contact richtea.alt@yahoo.com

Unique opportunity to start a small nursery garden in Pembrokeshire. Accommodation available. Call 01834810157 rogerswill6@gmail.com