



the friends
of Bedgebury
Pinetum

October 2013 First 'Best Of' issue

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Luke Wallace

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Something to Say?

If you have any news, photos, or just
have something to say, please email
the Editor at burtonje@gmail.com in
time for the next issue.

Volunteer News

Started in the 1840s as a private collection and then acquired by the Forestry Commission in 1925, Bedgebury National Pinetum now represents the most important single site for conifer conservation in the world. This is a fact that we can all be very proud of. While this remains the essence of Bedgebury, the site harbours much more than a tree collection.

A combination of recreational activities, nature, aesthetics and locality means Bedgebury is one of the most popular visitor attractions in the region.

However, contrast the annual number of visitors with the amount of resources available and it becomes clear that what volunteers contribute is more important than ever. It is this contribution that makes all the difference at a site like Bedgebury, enhancing both the visitor experience and the natural environment.

We hope the most rewarding part of volunteering is the sense of satisfaction you will receive from the work you'll undertake. We know that you all take great pride in doing a wonderful job for us. Your voluntary work with us is also valuable experience for potential employers and can be a great way to meet like-minded people. For many it is the exercise, fresh air and an escape from the house that draws you to us. Whatever your motivation you will always be welcome at Bedgebury.

This is the first 'Best of', so look out for another issue very soon.

Luke Wallace

Education



What does an education volunteer do?

The plan is, firstly, we help to set up the day's equipment - but today Joy and Debbie were so efficient, by the time I arrived at 9:00 they'd done it all! Secondly, we meet and greet the school as the coach arrives – but today the school were so eager, because of the glorious weather (and I don't joke it was very sunny), they were really early and already walking through the car park by the time we got there! I'll start to feel useful soon!

Having stowed their bags in the cubbyholes and visited the toilets the children set off with Joy and me up to the education area, for a team-building day. There are five different activities for the children to have a go at; namely Lumberjack Relay, Communication Caterpillar, Pollution Control, Adder Pit and the Hanoi Tower. My main role here is to encourage the children at the 'Hanoi Tower', but more importantly to stop the very well-meaning teachers from telling the children how to do it! In between this role there is always some string to untangle at the Pollution Control game – its funny how I always end up with a pocketful of tiny bits of string to throw away at the end of day.

Having completed these tasks it's time for the children to be a bit more creative and practical and build a shelter - with adults helping now they have 40 minutes or so to create a shelter out of long poles, sections of conifer branches and two upright posts with notches in them. Any inhibitions in the previous games are lost as they set to designing, gathering and creating a really impressive shelter. In order to ensure they stay busy there is a massive Southern Wood Ant nest in this area which is often teeming with the little blighters who are prone to spraying formic acid on you – ouch, it stings! Interestingly their Latin name is *Formica rufa*.

The shelters are tested for design, structure and water-proofing – this is when we get to throw water over the children! Here comes the fun bit, now that the children have so carefully created themselves a shelter the education volunteers have to dismantle them before this afternoon's group comes along. Luckily for me today I had coerced Ric from Visitor Services to assist me, as I was the only volunteer in today.

By now this afternoon's group have already started on their afternoon session – time to help with the Hanoi Tower again before a quick lunch, more shelters to dismantle and all the equipment to put away. I'm fairly tired after my day, have a swollen ankle and arm from bites and a pocketful of little bits of string but hopefully I've helped to make the children's day more enjoyable, made the tutors day easier and I've met some lovely children along the way.

Wednesday Wild Crew



Wednesday Wild Crew has seen a steady increase in numbers since the group was launched by our permanently enthusiastic and cheerful leader, Jo Pappenheim in September 2011 from a core group of around 5 or so volunteers to a maximum of 11 this June. Our members rarely miss out on a session, so we have become a cohesive group of varying ages and backgrounds, sharing not only a dislike for the “office” environment(!) , but also a common respect for nature together with a desire to work hard and learn more about the trees and plants in the Pinetum. We also share an enthusiasm for lively, controversial debate with various arguments being thrown around (often into the weed bin) whilst we are working. The session always ends with refreshments at the café, where we reflect on our mornings’ work and consider what projects lay ahead.

Our work these past few months might not be strikingly obvious or apparent to the casual passer- by, but the more observant and frequent visitor might notice that the dwarf conifer area by the entrance to the Pinetum and the newly planted areas in the car park have been freed from weeds and re-mulched. Under the able direction of Jim from the Forestry Commission, plants in the beautiful dwarf conifer area close to the forest office have likewise been tidied up and some less happy specimens extracted, so to focus the visitor’s attention on the amazing variety of colour, texture and shape that fills this section.

Our other major assignment this Spring was to check existing plant labels and add any new ones to the database which records every single specimen in the Pinetum. This has been an often frustrating, but ultimately rewarding task as it has improved our tree identification skills considerably! We owe a debt of gratitude to Julian who not only sets us up with the task of the day, but is very much one of the gang, with a genius for anticipating our needs, whether it be a perfectly timed tractor load of mulch, or just the right tool for the job.

Our group image was enhanced this month by the introduction of team T Shirts bearing not only the Bedgebury logo, but with bright pink writing on the navy blue background bearing the words “Wild Crew”. Unmistakable, therefore, and unforgettable, we feel we have earned ourselves an established role in the Pinetum, hopefully for many years to come!



Ambassadors

My name is Ben Dearsley and I'm 21 years old. My role here at Bedgebury is as a volunteer ambassador. Up until now I have done this alongside a BTEC ICT college course which has taken up most of my time. I have now completed the course with a grade of Distinction. Now that I have finished my studies I hope to carry on my work on a more regular basis as I'm now on a gap year, after which I may be attending Canterbury Christ Church University at Broadstairs to study Multimedia Design and Business Management. In the meantime, I have really been enjoying working as an ambassador. Whilst ICT is a good career for me, I much prefer working outdoors away from computers and working more directly with people, and the ambassador role is great for this. It is also something I take both pride and enjoyment from being part of.

So what do I do as an ambassador?

Well what can I say; no two days are ever the same. Each day has a new challenge. I generally just try to work where I'm needed. I often spend my time out of the ambassador tent, and I particularly enjoy working around the main car park - helping visitors with general questions and concerns and just trying to be as helpful as I can offering service with a smile, or maybe even a sticker! Then of course I sell maps. In fact I have been told by a number of people I hold the map selling record, to give you an idea, today's' grand total was 25.

The feedback from visitors and staff about my role is very good and everyone is very nice which makes Bedgebury a great place to work.

I would like to thank all the staff on site who make our roles possible, and look forward to more challenges and enjoyment in the future.

Text & photo: Ben Dearsley

Sunday Friends Working Group

Record Number of Sunday Volunteers . . .



Our last session before the summer break attracted an incredible 24 volunteers. This may have been due to the promise of a burger at the end of the morning, but most likely it was a dry day and people were just happy to be outside doing something. Later in the morning the sun came out and it was idyllic working among the wild flowers.

We were again clearing birch and willow in Churchill's Wood – some were clearing already cut trees, whilst others were clearing ditch lines to allow machinery in to deepen and repair the ditches. It did look a bit like a line of wood ants, as the trees were cut up and a chain of people carried the wood to the fire.



Unfortunately we suffered one casualty who was throwing wood onto the fire when a gust of wind blew flames on to his hands causing minor burns – he recovered sufficiently to eat two burgers though!



A big thank you to everyone who has helped this year and we will see you in September.

*Story & Photos:
Malcolm Dove*



Friends of Bedgebury Committee

My Bedgebury – a personal reflection.....

During the half term holiday I had the opportunity to visit some Forestry Commission sites further North; Dalby “The Great Yorkshire Forest” and Hamsterly in Co Durham. As a family we love the Forestry Commission offering and even chose to camp on an FC connected site nearby despite the season. With beautiful woodland, space and activities for everyone and plenty of fresh air whatever the weather, there is little not to love!

When compared to Bedgebury, Hamsterly feels small, but it has lovely walking and a delightful, but tiny, tea room. In contrast Dalby is huge! It has a Go Ape and Segway’s, a large visitor centre and an open air “village” area, beautiful play areas and miles and miles of walking. Although it was half term we saw very few others before 11am and walked for hours with only each other and the wildlife for company, a revelation for us after time spent in Bedgebury. It was a stark reminder of how many visitors we have at Bedgebury and how busy and occasionally claustrophobic it can become at peak times. The FC sites in the North were therefore refreshing and exciting for us. However they were both lacking a certain something; something that makes Bedgebury very special indeed.... Neither site had anything like that extraordinary little oasis that is the Pinetum.

Whilst woodland in this country is glorious, oak and beech woodland in particular, and I can (and do!) spend hours trying to find the perfect examples of both, the Pinetum is quite unique and just as beautiful. I’m ashamed to say that although we have lived in Flimwell for more than twenty years, we only discovered the Pinetum when my daughter was born 8 years ago and my post natal group was looking for somewhere to spend time together. We wanted to walk our baby weight off, get some fresh air to our squawking babies, drink tea and eat cake (in truth we weren’t too serious about the baby weight!). Bedgebury was clearly the perfect place. It became my second home then – long before the visitor centre and the arrival of the masses. As a venue for children new to their feet it is clean and grassy and safe; for noisy toddlers with energy to burn it is a place of adventure and imagination with goblins, giants, elves and pixies and all sorts of tree’s to hide amongst, in, up and under (sorry Chris – never any damage done!). Even now, when my daughter is far too grown up and sophisticated for talk of goblins, it is a place where I can be stalked on a walk by a variety of noisy 8 year olds and where they can play imaginary games for hours while I relax and watch. Sometimes we just spend an hour trying to decide on the most beautiful part of the Pinetum or the perfect spot for “our bench” when the time comes!



Bedgebury is busy and noisy on occasions and can feel excessively intimate if you brave the play areas during the school holidays, but the Pinetum is rarely busy and there is always a remote spot to enjoy, somewhere undiscovered by the majority seeking a more commercial fix. But however many people I have to share Bedgebury with, it always feels like home.

I don’t really consider myself to be a volunteer. Bedgebury is my special place. Like my home, it is OK to share it with others on occasion, indeed the best things are often shared, but it is also wonderful when I have it to myself for a while. So why wouldn’t I want to spend a little time making sure Bedgebury stays safe and looks it best? And why wouldn’t I want to make sure that everyone who pops by for a visit and a cuppa has a wonderful time? And why wouldn’t I want to share all the best bits whilst encouraging each visitor to give the place the reverence and respect it deserves.....? It is mine after all!

This is my way of saying a huge thank you to the hard working FC team, Friends team and all the wonderful volunteers who keep my Bedgebury beautiful, extraordinary, glorious and very, very special.

Story: Kathy Jary

Corporate Volunteering

We would like to say a big thank you to the team of Barclays Bank employees who spent a day at Bedgebury clearing the vegetation and wet area adjacent to Marshal's Lake. They worked tirelessly sawing, cutting and dragging unwanted vegetation and tending to the bonfire. A couple of them were even brave enough to put on waders and clear the stream.

They thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to work outside, commenting on how beautiful and peaceful the Pinetum was and promising to visit again.

Story & Photos: Jo Pappenheim



Go-Ape Volunteer Session



I recently shared the Go Ape experience with some fellow volunteers of Bedgebury, swinging high in the trees, like on a flying trapeze!!

I faced my fears as have not done anything this adventurous in a while. I'm very pleased I did it too as it was brilliant fun and was sorry when it was all over!

I overcame my initial anxieties whilst we were given the safety briefing, but later felt some things were not registering due to nerves as I was getting my safety equipment in a muddle. Somehow it all made sense and before long I was having a ball!

I highly recommend it to anyone, even if they are very apprehensive but maybe have a secret desire for adventure - apart from those who have a big fear of heights!

Text: Jacquie Huntington ~ Photos: Catherine Abbott ~ YouTube movie by Peter Mannion

Go to this link to experience it for yourself! <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mHcO-yuvBS0>

News from the Olympics!

I'm sitting in the sunshine on the balcony of my holiday cottage in the Highlands of Scotland, surrounded by woodland - the peace and quiet here couldn't be more different from the hustle and bustle I recently experienced as a volunteer at the Olympic Park in Stratford.



After so many years of preparation and anticipation I can't believe the London 2012 Games are over, but I am so pleased to look back and know that I was part of it - even if I was just one of 70,000 volunteer Gamesmakers.

My role was as a Team Member of Event Services at the Aquatics Centre. This was a really varied role - on four of my eight shifts I found myself standing in a windy corridor or on a cold rainy entrance bridge. My role was to welcome spectators; 'soft check' tickets in order to direct spectators to the correct queue or door; answer questions; say goodbye and gently hurry them along when leaving the venue. I also took numerous group photos of families and couples standing in front of the venue or with the backdrop of the nearby Stadium and Orbit. But most of all my role was to 'smile' at the spectators 😊

The role I probably enjoyed the most was scanning tickets. A team of about twenty of us, using hand held scanners, would scan 17,500 tickets in an hour and a half. It was manically busy but we got to talk to the spectators and really share in the fantastic atmosphere. The effort so many people made to show

their support of their home team was amazing - from full sari dress, to blow up kangaroos, little girls in Union Jack dresses, tricolours painted on faces, stars and stripes flags draped around them and so many more...

But I guess the highlight of our role had to be going inside the venue - from outside the venue we could hear the cheers, we got updates of what was happening - I'll never forget an American lad shouting "we saw history made tonight" when Michael Phelps broke yet another record. But once inside the amazing Aquatics Centre we really felt we were part of that history being made. Our role inside the venue was to



direct spectators to their seats and to keep an eye out for anything amiss - unruly behaviour, blatant advertising, flash photography during diving, and press photographers trying to get the best photos by sneaking into any available seat... I was lucky enough to be inside during the first week when the swimming was taking place - the noise when a GB swimmer was announced or was swimming was unbelievable. I was moved to tears during one medal ceremony when a Chinese man sitting way up high in the seating bowl sung his national anthem at the top of his voice.

On my last shift I watched the whole of the team synchronised swimming final from high up in the seating bowl - all I can say is "wow"; they make it look so effortless and graceful and it was really beautiful to watch.

By the end of the games I have to admit I was shattered - I certainly don't wish to catch the 5:25 train from High Brooms ever again!



I feel quite overwhelmed and humbled by all the "thank yous" directed towards the Gamesmakers. I shall certainly treasure the memories of a wonderful two weeks spent at the London 2012 Olympics and all the interesting people I met. It's amazing how many people just wanted to hear about what I was doing just because I was wearing the groovy purple uniform; from the lady who wanted to chat in the pouring rain at gone midnight as alighting the train at High Brooms; to the veteran Olympian who was part of the shooting team at the 1972 Munich Games; to the fellow Gamesmakers who would just chat to me all the time - it felt like we were all part of one big family.

Text & photos: Liz Randall



News from the desk of Dominic Robinson

What a pleasure it is to be sat looking out at the sunshine lighting up the fresh new growth across the site from my office window. We've had our fair share of rain in the last month, but that has made conditions all the more perfect for the full abundance of Bedgebury flora to spring forth; needed all the more as the last of our 111 cherry trees in the newest avenue has only just been planted this week! The rain will really help the trees to settle in and take root. This landscaping project, from the visitor centre to the play area, is now nearly complete and looking truly magnificent. This will be an extension of our 'Red Carpet Route' as many mums, dads and children will be travelling up and down this route to the play area and back. Let's hope that the grass seed and ox-eye daisies planted underneath take, and it continues to green up before the official launch on 8th August!

It's not often that 'management' get off their backsides and venture out of the office these days, but the first bank holiday in May I briefly popped in to help the team at the Visitor Centre on what turned out to be the busiest day we've ever had at Bedgebury (bar a concert) in the history of the site. It was fantastic to see so many families milling everywhere and the bank opposite the visitor centre was filled with picnickers spread amongst the trees. It was a joy to see and never has the work done by you, all our volunteers, been more appreciated. The site was looking at its smartest and finest. All that was there for me to do was empty bins and deal with the artfully sprayed aftermath of one child's overindulgence in Eugene's ice creams in front of the payment machines. But that didn't spoil my day, not just because I have an eye on the finances, but because I also really want people to come to Bedgebury to be inspired by the beauty of the place and wonder and marvel at the magnificent trees in this special collection.

Once more, thank you for your work, in all its diverse forms, in continuing to maintain and develop Bedgebury and make it that special place which can inspire even 'management' to get off their backside and get stuck in!