



# From the Wood

Issue 5

Issued not often enough

Spring 2012

## What's been did and what's been hid

It's been a long time since the last edition of this newsletter for which we can only offer our deepest apologies. We have been so caught up with possible dangers to the woods and how to deal with them, I'm afraid we have neglected our members.

A lot of the trees in the wood are larch trees. In the last ten years, a disease called *Phytophthora ramorum* has killed large numbers of trees in south west England. Two years ago, it spread to south Wales. If it comes to Blaen Brân, all the larch trees would have to be destroyed as soon as possible with all costs borne by ourselves. The vast majority of the trees in the woodland are larch trees. The main bulk of the larch is at the top end of the woodland and has been badly overplanted so it needs to be removed sooner or later anyway.

Due to the economic climate, grants to do such work have all but disappeared. However we did find a grant for a social enterprise which might enable us to do the work over a period of time. However, we



*One of the areas cleared of larch. You can see how much light gets in now*

had to prove that we could do something that made a profit of some sort and provide employment. So we decided to make a virtue out of necessity and see whether there would be a market for larch logs.

Some market research showed there may well be so we have launched Blaen Brân Woodland Services. This enterprise aims to make a small profit from selling larch firewood for wood burning stoves. The wood has to be

seasoned for some considerable time before it can be sold so it will be a year or two before any money is made. Dave Higginson has been appointed woodland manager and is employed on a part time basis.

The thinning of the larch around the beech avenue has begun so we can now breathe a little easier about any problems that may come our way regarding tree disease. All felling will cease at the end of March so it will be safe to walk there then.



*Some of the brash - small branches and twigs- left after felling. It's burnt off in a controlled way.*

## New car park a big success

I'm sure by now you have all seen the new car park .

We were approached earlier in the year by people from Torfaen Borough Council asking us if they could work on improving the car parking facilities as part of something called the Valleys Regional Park Project. We agreed and suggested the best place for a car park would be just above Siloam Chapel where the road makes a sharp bend to the left rather than their preferred option of just inside the gate by the chapel in the Square.

It took a long time to do but we all think the end result looks really good. As an added bonus, all the horses from Tickens



*New car park complete with sign and imposing stone boulders*

Trekking can now use this entrance so they no longer have to negotiate that hairpin bend just by the entrance .

We then found that cyclists were finding it extremely difficult to get their bikes in so we asked Torfaen Borough Council what could be done. They put in a stile that was

not suitable as it was too wide. We have since made it more restrictive so cyclists can use it but motorbikes would be difficult to get in.



*Kissing gate, horse gate and bicycle stile - easy entry for all on foot*



## Volunteering it's a tree- mendous success



One of the consequences of the social enterprise has been a marked increase in volunteers working in the woods. "The response has been fantastic" said woodland manager Dave Higginson. "Volunteers are putting in about 200 hours a month and that's in the winter."



Volunteers Pete Osborne and Rees Jones shift some logs for storage

## New Twmbarlwm group

We're really pleased to see a group formed to protect Twmbarlwm and intend to give them all the help we can. They've only been going a year but have already cleaned up a lot and now trying to see what they can do to keep motorbikes from ruining this iconic ancient monument. It's good to see other groups trying to conserve our countryside for future generations. Anyone interested in joining, helping or just wants to get more information, the website is <http://www.twmbarlwm.co.uk>. They meet the first Monday of each month at Cross Keys rugby club.



Steps up to the middle track from the arboretum - all done by volunteers

Certainly, if you visit the woods, especially on a Sunday morning, there is a lot of enthusiastic activity going on. "I just enjoy it," said volunteer Peter Osborne. "I'm part of creating something beautiful that will last a long time."

Some of the volunteers have had training in woodland skills such as chainsaw safety. This means we can now cut down trees ourselves rather than contract professionals to do it.

There are signs of their work everywhere and not just where the larch are being felled. The attractive steps that lead from the middle track to the arboretum were made by a small



The twmp at Twmbarlwm. You can see motor bike tracks scarring the trails.

Blaen Brân Community Woodland is a registered charity, no. 1120995



The Newsletter of Blaen Brân  
Community Woodland

group of obviously very talented volunteers.

"There are tasks that can be done by people of all ages and abilities," explained woodland manager Dave Higginson. "When we've finished felling in the spring, there'll be a greater variety of things to be done - planting, weeding and tidying. It's far cheaper than a gym, you are out in the fresh air and you have the satisfaction of knowing you are contributing to something that can be enjoyed by your grandchildren." And so say all of us.

## What's On

### Every Sunday

A working party does maintenance in the woods. Meet by Mineslope Cottage from 9.00 Contact Dave 07787525875 or email [blauenbran@gmail.com](mailto:blauenbran@gmail.com) for more details or information about midweek volunteer work

### March 17th

11.00 Ancient Cwmbran Society are walking the woodland

### April 2nd

**Woodland nature walk** 10.00 led by our forester David Parsons

### April 10th

**The Great Easter Egg Hunt** 14.00 Once again David Williams will be organising the popular Easter egg hunt for children.

### June 23rd

**Midsummer night barbecue** (to be confirmed)

Possibly including a flame organ, fire juggling and other attractions

## For all details of events

Come visit our website

[www.blaenbran.org.uk](http://www.blaenbran.org.uk)

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