



NEWSLETTER

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NEW MACHINERY FOR HIRE

Two generous souls have come forward with offers regarding machinery - a flail mounted on a two-wheeled tractor and a log-splitter - which they would like the community to be able to make use of.

The Gondoli two-wheeled tractor with flail belongs to Martin Pagnamenta of Church Farm, St Briavels. This powerful machine is about 75 cm (2' 6") wide, so should be able to tackle those rare jobs where even the PGP's Alpine tractor can't reach. This would be suitable for cutting grass, bracken or bramble in situations with very narrow access, or for example around the trees in an orchard. Martin will operate the machine himself, and anyone who is interested in using this service should contact him direct, on 01594 531 151, to discuss terms.



The log-splitter belongs to David Clifford of Windward House, on St Briavels Common. It is petrol driven, has a power rating of



10 tons, and the handbook states that it is suitable to split logs of up to 32 cm in diameter, although I have used it for larger logs. It is a heavy machine, quite difficult to transport. I will deliver the log-splitter to (and collect it from) PGP members who wish to use it, and demonstrate its operation. For an initial experimental period I propose to charge £10 for delivery and collection, which will go to PGP funds. If members need to have a quantity of logs split but are not able to do the work themselves, please get in touch and we can come to some other arrangement. If you are interested in using the log-splitter, contact me on 01594 531 496 or at mike.topp@yahoo.co.uk Mike Topp

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DIARY

17 March - 7.30 at MacKenzie Hall - AGM and talk on **Badgers**

- Keith Childs author of "The Badger Diaries" will talk about his 40 year observations
- John Childs will address the dilemma faced by farmers to control bovine TB

20 July - Woodland walk in the Hudnalls

Flower of the month



Dogs Mercury
Mercurialis perennis

SUBSCRIPTIONS NOW DUE

Your subscriptions for 2011 are now due. The rate has been maintained, yet again, at £5 per household per year. This low rate equates for a couple to just under 5 pence per week. Your prompt payment would be very much appreciated. Please send your cheque/cash to:

Jean Pitt, Parish Grasslands Project, Court Cottage, Hewelsfield, Lydney GL15 6UL.

Buttercups in the Hudnalls by George Peterken

Buttercups are the quintessential meadow flower, the species that has most often attracted the attention of poets. When Robert Browning wrote his *Home thoughts from Abroad* (Oh to be in England, now that April's there...), he remembered 'the buttercup, the little childrens' dower, far brighter than this gaudy melon flower.' Elizabeth Jennings' poem *English Wild Flowers* asks us to 'Look, the buttercup, stares at the sun and seems to take a share of wealthy light'. Sylvia Plath, in her verbal *Watercolour of Grantchester Meadows*, noticed how 'Spotted cows revolve their jaws and crop / Red clover or gnaw beetroot / Bellied on a nimbus of sun-glazed buttercup.' And, I've always assumed that the 'bright golden haze over the meadow' in *Oklahoma* (Oh, what a beautiful mornin') evoked buttercups introduced with other fodder plants from Europe to feed the European immigrants' cattle.

We have three main species of buttercup in our fields. Two, the **meadow buttercup** and the **bulbous buttercup**, are very similar, but the latter flowers first and can be distinguished by its reflexed (bent back) sepals. The third is the **creeping buttercup**, which puts out long runners and has a furrowed flower stalk. They all have the bright, shiny, yellow flowers that children once held under their chins to see if they liked butter.

They prefer slightly different soils, something brilliantly demonstrated by a botanist at Oxford, who noticed that one grew on the ridges of ridge-and-furrow, one grew on the sloping sides, and the other grew in the furrows. In that order, Bulbous buttercup likes dry soils: it's commoner on limestone grassland and its range extends to the Mediterranean and the steppes. Meadow buttercup likes moist soils, so it's the species that forms displays on large, flat, riverside meadows. Creeping buttercup goes for damp soils and marshes, and is quite capable of growing in wet woods. Hereabouts it is the gardener's curse, for, unlike the other two, it seeds readily into flower borders, infiltrates perennials and sets up a bank of dormant seed that frustrates any attempt at weeding.

We also have three buttercup-relatives. One, the abundant **lesser celandine**, is one of the first to show in spring, and is every bit as yellow and shiny as the rest. The **lesser spearwort** is a species of marshes, which can be seen in a few fields, such as Jean Green's, where it was one of the flowers found by the play group last year. The third is the dainty **goldilocks buttercup**, which grew on the far edge of the playing fields by the Village Shop until it was smothered by grass clippings: we hope it is still somewhere in the Hudnalls.



Meadow buttercup *Ranunculus acris*



Bulbous buttercup *Ranunculus bulbosus*



Creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens*



Lesser celandine *Ranunculus ficaria*



Lesser spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*



Goldilocks buttercup *Ranunculus auricomus*



Slow Food by Tony Eggar

Our committee member and local farmer, John Childs, has been a member of the Slow Food organisation for a few years. This brief article will explain the essence of Slow Food and John's involvement in it.

 Slow Food is a global, grassroots organization with supporters in 150 countries around the world who are linking the pleasure of good food with a commitment to their community and the environment.

A non-profit member-supported association, Slow Food was founded in 1989 to counter the rise of fast food and fast life, the disappearance of local food traditions and people's dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it comes from, how it tastes and how our food choices affect the rest of the world.

Today, there are over 100,000 members joined in 1,300 convivia (local branches) worldwide, as well as a network of 2,000 food communities who practice small-scale and sustainable production of quality foods.

Slow Food's approach to agriculture, food production and gastronomy is based on a concept of food quality defined by the three interconnected principles of Good, Clean and Fair food for all:

GOOD a fresh and flavorsome seasonal diet that satisfies the senses and is part of our local culture;

CLEAN food production and consumption that does not harm the environment, animal welfare or our health;

FAIR accessible prices for consumers and fair conditions and pay for small-scale producers.

One part of Slow Food's remit is Biodiversity. In 2003 the **Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity** was founded. The Foundation runs projects which are focused on protecting food biodiversity and traditions, and promoting sustainable agriculture.

Their key project is the Presidia: sustainable food production initiatives which build the capacity of a group of producers in order to improve production techniques, develop production protocols and find local and international markets. To date, more than 300 Presidia have been created around the world, involving over 10,000 small-scale sustainable farmers. Each Presidium supports a quality product at risk of extinction; uses traditional processing and/or agricultural methods; and safeguards native breeds and local plant varieties.

This is where John Childs comes in.

Gloucester Cattle were on the verge of extinction in 1973. There are now 75 herds in the country. However, most are kept by smallholders rather than commercially, so herd sizes are very small resulting in few actually being used for the traditional products of cheese and beef. In addition one criteria of the Presidia is that they must be linked to their historic production area. Cowshill Farm is in Gloucestershire and so complies with this.



Sue, Robert & John Childs with Old Gloucester calf

Traditionally a pig farmer, John moved on to native pig breeds and subsequently a few Gloucesters as they were placid making them easier to handle than those selectively bred to meet modern requirements.

John, wife Sue and son Rob, have built up their herd of Gloucester cattle to currently around 75. These cattle take much longer to reach maturity and thus a lot more land is needed. By selling their meat on a basis of quality as opposed to quantity, the Childs family are making a success of the enterprise.

The Slow Food movement helps them promote their traditional products whilst helping educate the public at large about how they differ from the mass produced alternatives.



Food from our Fields by Jean Pitt and Tony Eggar

By way of a novel idea for our Autumn meeting, it was decided to see what we could come up with in the way of wild 'eats'. One of the first things we had to confront was the vagaries of the weather, meaning that there was a dearth of fungi, a core item that perhaps most people would associate with food from the fields. Undaunted, the "Food from our Fields" meeting on Saturday 2nd October was able to produce four trestle tables laden with food and drinks made with what we had culled from field and hedgerow.

The meeting, chaired by Sarah Sawyer, opened by serving to the audience a "dose" of rosehip syrup, the old-fashioned vitamin-C rich protection against childhood colds. The various items of produce were then introduced by those who had prepared the dishes. John Josephi's account of trying to skin a squirrel with two pairs of pliers made for some laughter. Nettle and mushroom soups featured along with game pate, rabbit and the aforesaid dish a number of us were keen to sample for the first time – squirrel (a fairly chewy, gamey kind of flavour). Steve Orledge from St. Briavels made an offer we could not refuse, to bring a pheasant stew and some venison, which he sauteed freshly at the meeting. Among the vegetables, we were able at the last minute to source a platter of parasol mushrooms, together with wild green tartlets (made with nettle and ground elder), jellies of sloe and quince, and elderberry chutney. An interesting green salad combination included sorrel, clover, lamb's lettuce and dandelion. Desserts ranged from yogurt with cherry plum, apple with blackberry and apple with elderberry cakes, along with baskets of nuts and fresh rosy red apples to finish.

On the drinks table we sampled the wines of parsnip, blackberry, tayberry and plum (generously provided by Arthur and Andi Cale), elderflower champagne and elderflower cordial.

Mike Topp gave a short resume of the Slow Food Movement, which started in Italy, and of which our local producer of meat, John Childs, is a select member and keen supporter. This echoed the point of our meeting, that there are alternatives to the chemically-treated, processed and packaged food we are swamped with today. A full article on Slow Food by John Childs is reproduced earlier in this Newsletter.

By popular demand we have reproduced a few of the recipes, especially the Bushytail with Autumn Apples!

Bushytail with Autumn Apples

4 Squirrels – cut into joints

2 ozs Flour

1 tbsp. Cinnamon

Olive oil

4 Crab Apples

2/3 Bay Leaves

4 cups Cider

2 tbsp Cornflour

3 tbsp Water



Mix flour and cinnamon in a bag.

Heat oil in frying pan.

Shake squirrel pieces in flour.

Place meat in hot oil & fry over medium heat until browned all over

Peel, core & slice the apples.

When meat browned, place in casserole.

Layer on apples and add bay leaves.

Pour in cider. Cover with foil or lid & bake for 2 hrs @ 350

Remove meat from bone & cut into small pieces if for tasters only.

Otherwise place joints on serving plate, remove bay leaves &

pour sauce over.

If thicker sauce required, mix cornflour & water together, stir into the sauce & stir until thick.

Rowan Jelly

4 lbs Rowan berries, stalked and gently washed

3 lb crab apples, peeled and cored

Put in heavy-based pan and cover with water.

Bring to boil and take off any scum.

Bring down to strong simmer until berries & apples going mushy.

Strain the mix through muslin and throw away the residue of berries & apples.

Measure the fluid remaining and return it to the pan.

Add granulated sugar in proportion of 1 Kilo sugar to 1 litre of fluid

Bring to the boil and stir.

Maintain the boil at the lowest level possible. Keep stirring!

When the fluid starts to become more viscous & slow moving, take the pan off heat. Leave to stand for 10 minutes.

Have jam jars clean & ready to fill!

Apple Chutney

4 lbs sour apples (peeled and cored)

1 lb sultanas

½ lb onions

1 tbs mustard seed (crushed)

1 lemon - juice and grated rind

1 dsp ground ginger

1½ pts vinegar

2 lbs soft brown sugar



Mince the apples, sultanas and onions.

Add mustard seed, lemon juice & rind, ginger and 1 pt vinegar.

Cook until soft.

Dissolve sugar in remaining vinegar, add to mixture.

Cook until thick, then pour into warm jars, cover and tie.