



Forestry England

Bedgebury

Apprentice Blog

May 2021

By Ella

This month began with Sarah and me making our way up to Cannock Chase in Staffordshire, for our trimmer, brush cutter and clearing saw course. We spent a week learning all about how to maintain and use this machine.

A trimmer is the component we used for cutting grass and small weeds; a brush cutter is a triangular blade that is used for cutting weeds and other foliage, and a clearing saw is a circular blade that is mainly used for clearing woodland, bushes and undergrowth. The image to the right shows one of the clearing saw cuts we learnt. The cut is called a *step cut* and is used to fell stems over 50mm in diameter. The machine we were using had a lot in common with a chainsaw, so completing the chainsaw course only a couple of weeks previously definitely came in handy! The same engine is used for each attachment; you simply attach the component you need onto the end of the machine, depending on the task. The attachments are easily interchangeable and maintained when on site.



Trimmer head



Brush cutter blade



Clearing saw blade



Engine component

During this week we met several other Forestry England apprentices completing the same scheme on locations in different Forestry England districts. It was interesting to hear about how they came to find and apply for their respective posts, as well as to learn about their previous experiences. I look forward to meeting more apprentices as our time continues. I have found that Sarah's and my experiences at Bedgebury are substantially different and more diverse, since we are based in a pinetum rather than a forest.



'Unestablished' tree checks are important and are carried out throughout the year as new specimens are planted and the trees continue to grow and develop.

I really enjoy completing this task and find it very satisfying. We tidy up the area where we are working, and we make sure each specimen is being given what it needs to thrive and reach its maximum potential. This can vary from creating a new, larger tree cage that allows the tree to be protected from rabbit and deer whilst also giving it room to grow, to simply adding some more mulch to allow the soil to maintain moisture in hotter weather, to suppress the weeds and to improve the soil texture.



We use a botanical garden database called 'Iris BG' which keeps data on the Pinetum's tree collection. On Iris you can find out where a specimen originates from, details of how it was grown in the nursery, the location of where it is in the Pinetum and details of what happens to the specimen through its life, including potential pests and diseases it may fall prey to.

One of my favourite trees, in Section 26, is the *Dacrycarpus dacrydioides* or kahikatea (its name in the Māori language). It is a conifer native to New Zealand. The tree grows to the great height of up to 65 meters and is New Zealand's tallest forest tree! One of the reasons why this tree interests me is that at first glance you assume the tree is dead or dying due to the colour of the foliage; however, the tree purposely does this so that animals that might eat the foliage assume it's dead, thereby avoiding it in favour of other food!



Towards the end of the month, I spent a day of consolidation on the tractor; our task was to top up the wood chip on the play trail. This really helped to refresh my memory on what I had learnt on my tractor training course in December. The mixed use of the trailer and front loader, throughout the day, gave me more confidence for my assessment which is coming up soon. The weather during the day was very dramatic, with thunder, lightning, and hailstones, adding an extra layer of excitement to the job. I must say I was very glad to be inside the tractor cab! I enjoyed the drive back and forth from the yard, giving me the opportunity to admire the Pinetum and Forest with the leaves and flowers emerging. I look forward to seeing how the landscape changes throughout the year.