



Forestry England

# Bedgebury Apprentice Blog

September 2021

By Ella

This month started with a trip up-to Cannock for the week, where we learnt all about timber harvesting. This involved a large range of subjects based around the variety of processes which allow standing trees to then be produced into timber. This can vary greatly, depending on the topography and structure of the environment, the species and size of the trees, the access and size of the site, amongst other aspects.



One of the days we headed out to the forest to see a forwarder in action. A forwarder is an **articulated machine consisting of an operator's cab and a log bunk**. They are basically tractors pulling a wagon load of wood, that move logs from the forest to roadside, where they are then taken by a timber lorry. It turned out that Sarah and I knew the forwarder driver Andy, who was our flail trainer from a couple of months previous! He was also heading to Bedgebury the following week to assess Sarah and I for our tractor qualification.



The machinery that has been used during our training, such as the forwarder and the harvester, are pieces of kit we rely on heavily for efficient and effective timber extraction. A harvester may be a wheeled or tracked machine with a processing head attachment. The processing head is capable of felling, delimiting, and bucking a tree to desired lengths. Seeing these machines in action is quite a sight to see, they are extremely impressive.

We were also lucky enough to meet a couple of foresters, who came to talk to us about a variety of subjects from what their job entails to a presentation on different types of diseases tree suffer from. This was so interesting and insightful, the knowledge us apprentices are surrounded by, I find to be so inspiring.

Sarah and I were with another five apprentices, from the same apprenticeship, but based in different locations across England. It was so good to catch up with them all and meet the final apprentice we hadn't yet met. Despite everyone coming from completely different backgrounds, we are so passionate about the work we do and all the opportunities we are given.

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The apprentices are hopefully heading down to Bedgebury for a week in December to complete their pole saw qualification. They will also spend the day with Dan, the Pinetum Curator, to look at tree identification. The Apprenticeship Manager Neil is keen to ensure all the apprentices have the chance to go to a site that is completely different to where they're based. This will be a great opportunity to experience how much the job, as a Forest Craftsperson can vary depending on where you are situated in the country. Out of all the Forestry England apprentice positions Bedgebury is the most diverse. Sarah and I are specifically pinetum staff, whereas our fellow apprentices, are more typical Forest Craftspeople, caring for and managing woodland areas and forests.



September amongst the tree team is known as flailing season. Flailing is the process of powerfully cutting vegetation with a rotating drum that has heavy duty knives/blades or chains attached. These are decks that attach mainly to the front or back of tractors. We have areas of grass around the Pinetum that are mown weekly and areas of grass which are left throughout the summer for wildlife. At the beginning of autumn, the remaining long grass must be cut so we hire in both a flail and flail collect machine. A flail collect is used to collect up the grass after it has been cut, the grass is then placed into a pile. Then we come along with the tractor, trailer and grab the cuttings to take them to our fire yard. Here they are left to turn into compost.

This month was also the first time I used the sit on mower. I found this to be a very satisfying job being amongst the specimens and seeing a large amount of the Pinetum, some places I had never been! One of the many things I love about working at Bedgebury is you regularly see areas and trees you had never been to or picked up on before.



The high weald walking festival took place this month, one of the locations where the event was held is Bedgebury. The connection between Bedgebury and the High Weald AONB are the similar characteristics and Geology. Being roughly in the middle of the weald and with its undulating landscape, protected ancient woodlands, routeways such as the sunken track, wooded heathlands and other key components of the High Weald AONB.

Sarah and I were given the opportunity to give a guided tour of the pinetum to selected amount of the public, on a topic and route of our choice. We decided on basic conifer identification and the history of Bedgebury to be our topic of conversation. Despite the nerves, Sarah and I really enjoyed sharing our passion of the incredible place that Bedgebury is.

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