



Forestry England

Bedgebury Apprentice Blog

April 2021

By Sarah



April..... Well, what a month, and where do I start! Spring has arrived and everything seems to be waking up - blossom on the trees, spring bulbs, pollen on the conifers and bird song fills the air.

This has been a particularly busy month for Ella and me. We started by planting a new section of hedge alongside Lady Oak Lane. We used a mix of natural hedging plants, tubed them to protect them from being eaten and mulched the ground around them to keep moisture in and to help improve the soil. Eventually, these plants will grow to become a lovely natural fence line around the Pinetum which will be great for wildlife too!

The following week there was more planting, but on a slightly larger scale, at Friston Forest, East Sussex. We were lucky enough to work with district team members Vaughn and Bill, two very experienced crafts people.





Using a mix of oak and cedar we created a new plantation. We used ranging poles as guides, to keep our rows straight, and set about planting the saplings. Ella and I used a planting tool with a particularly great name, a 'pottiputki'. You put the end of the pottiputki in the ground, open the mouth using a peddle at the base, then you drop your small sapling down the shaft and gently lift the machine up and over; then you use your heel to firm the ground around the tree. The four of us managed to plant at least 6,000 trees, and this was only a quarter of the field! The district team finished off the planting the following week. It is amazing to think we have been a part of creating a new forest.

The next couple of weeks saw Ella and me embarking on one of the hardest courses and assessments in our apprenticeship... our basic chainsaw course. Now, I am not going to lie, I was a little daunted and slightly intimidated. Using a chainsaw is not something to take for granted! In the first couple of days, we learnt about the chainsaw itself, its maintenance and how to make sure the machine is fit for purpose. This is a great way to get to know the equipment and how it works. There are ten safety features on a chainsaw, which I found a little more reassuring, but obviously these only work when maintained regularly.

We learnt how to sharpen the teeth on the chain. This is done every time the saw is used and sometimes while out on site. This is an integral part of the maintenance needed to keep the saw working efficiently and safely. The next phase was to go to site, kitted out in our safety gear: trousers, boots, gloves, hard hat and jacket, all in the universally recognised hi-viz orange colour. I got quite attached to my kit! There is so much to consider before you start to fell a tree. First, we have to perform a risk assessment of the site, making sure any paths are signed and/or taped off. We check for hazards, such as working out the best access points for any emergency services and checking for any hanging branches and windblown trees, to mention just a few. We also need to check for flora and fauna, nesting birds, dormice, signs of bats, orchids, native blue bells - again just some of the examples.





Now for our first fell Eeek...! Rob, our amazing instructor, talked us through and demonstrated our first cut, the standard. Starting my chainsaw and performing the necessary checks I picked my tree. With Rob watching safely on the side lines I made my cuts and, with big relief, down she went. We went on to learn how to process trees for timber use and the different felling cuts for various types of trees, as no two trees ever grow the same. I think my favourite was the split level, shown in the photograph.

It is a slightly more technical cut but a good all-rounder. At the end of the two weeks, we had our independent assessment, and I am pleased to report that both Ella and I passed! I was mentally and physically drained, but loved every minute and what a sense of achievement. Ella and I can't thank Rob, our trainer, enough for his brilliant guidance. He was the perfect combination of encouragement, patience, and knowledge.

On a little side note, here is a photo of the bark of one of the eucalyptus trees found in the Plots. The colours, shapes, and textures are just stunning. When walking friends and family around the Pinetum and pointing out the various beautiful features of individual trees, the most common feedback I get is "Gosh I haven't really gone and looked closely" and "What amazing details". My closing suggestion to you this month is that you should take the time to walk up to our magnificent trees and appreciate all their gorgeousness.



Thanks for reading.

Sarah