



Lifelong Learning Programme

eucan

La Brenne, France February 2010 (Rob McBride - Tree hunter)



Leonardo da Vinci
European Training for the UK



TREE-Mendous fun Tree hunting with EuCAN in La Brenne, Feb 2010

Certain points need saying at the start of this report so that by the time you are bored reading, at least you will have some important points to remember.

Possibly up to 80% of the ancient trees of northern Europe are in the UK! Ok, think about that. So, that means, yes, there are only around 20% in the whole of the rest of northern Europe. It obviously follows from this that any veteran or ancient trees that are found are very special and should be protected at all costs. (Well obviously if it is safe and practical to do so).

‘The UK is The European Rainforest’

If you want to have a giggle? Then jump to the end where we compiled on our way home a little list of great jokes??? sayings and items. See if you can attribute what to who? Have fun...

Right let's get to it. Where are the trees?

Getting off the ferry in Caen, still dark and sitting in the front of the 'van is not a great way to spot trees but as soon as light started to dawn we started to see what the French have, lots of...pollarded street trees. I have not had a full conversation as to why they are cut so often or so much but perhaps will find out next trip. Some reasons are obvious e.g., for shade, for ornamental reasons, for safety, and also for wood fuel. Wood fuel in France is very expensive, sometimes 1,000 Euros for a winters supply. Their woodlands of which there are many are well worked woodlands and have been for a long time. In the UK logs for sale are still too cheap for the amount of work and energy involved, but this is changing as people understand the benefits of sustainable fuel sources.

As we progressed towards Sees for our morning brandy ... I mean coffee, we started to see lots of these knobbly pollards. Later that day we arrived at Nigel and Kathy's friends in La Grande Fontaine.

Here we were treated to an amazing meal and lovely company. We also went around the 'nature reserve' they have created or inherited. There were nice old fruit trees and a couple of baby oaks that were soon 'hugged' by my apprentice tree hunters, Helen, Heather and Lisa.



L-r Lisa, Heather, Helen get to grips with a 3.5 metre girth oak

We later arrived at Mezeires-en-Brenne and unpacked. A little later on some of the gang needed to stretch our legs so we went local tree hunting. After a little walk we turned down a 'bridleway'? to find some really nice old hedgerow pollards. There were quite a few 'lapsed' pollards. That is to say they had been left to go 'out of cycle. These trees could most probably benefit from a little trim back.



Back in the town we wandered around and soon discovered the lovely old pollards in the streets.



Lisa hugs a street pollard in Mezeires.

Sunday morning saw us visit Cherine reserve. Apparently there were some 'ducks' there? (I was trying not to be overwhelmed as coming from Ellesmere, Shropshire's Lakeland as they call it where we have millions of 'ducks' I am a little blasé about ducks), I joke, as I actually do like some species e.g., grebes, herons. After looking at ducks for a while I went hunting. I found at the back of the Cistude 'hide' was a nice 3.77 metre girth Oak (measured at narrowest point 0.8 metre height from ground)

We also visited Etang De La Mer Rouge and found an Ash of 3.40 metre girth @ 1.5m in the car park. On the walk we came across a really nice Oak by the lake. Leaning well over it was 3.91 m @ 1.5m. So a nice old oak. It later turned out that this tree is so special and well known it has postcards of it for sale in the information centre! In the UK well let's just say there are a few hundred thousand like this. Sorry I am bragging now, it's like Tony Williams and the number of French butterflies compared to the UK.



Oak at the Red Lake.

We did also go to Saint sur piece? And saw some great trees there also. I seem not to have any pics? Anyone got any?

Just a note here on the uses of wood:

Oak needed for flooring, export, barrels, sleepers on rails better than concrete

Wood fuel; Fences; Oak chips for wine making in cheaper wine; Shade

(In woodlands there were a lot of Corsican pine, but now not so much. Fires a lot and precautions cost a lot is what I was told.

Even though on this day, there was not any tree hunting I just cannot miss out my most enjoyable days of work of the whole visit. We had a group from a nearby home for special needs people called Le Foyer I think.

I was given my little team of Nicolas, Karine and Jackie and got busy. They had a great time sawing, cutting and generally working very hard. They were great. It is the first time I have worked with special needs folks and I think I gained as much if not more out of the experience than they did. A very special memory in my time there.



Monday night / Tuesday morning: A set back...but came good in the end.

A few years back I had to give up my career being 'burnt out' and suffered very badly with anxiety even to the point of not being able to go out for a while. At least it enabled me to rebuild myself and in the end get out and meet some amazing people in the world of ancient trees and turn myself into a tree hunter. This trip was to be a major test for me as I knew that if I had sleep problems then that b*** anxiety would return very badly.

Here, I must thank Nigel and Kathy for working tirelessly to arrange and organise everything. This enabled me to return to being 15 years old again. Things like being driven and told where to go what to do was such a break for me. As many would testify it enabled me to relax and come out with many, many brilliant jokes!!!! NOT. Poor old Nigel made the mistake of saying "You do not have to explain your jokes to me"!! Sorry Nigel, big mistake! Every joke had to be explained. So suffice to say we had lots of great fun times and personally I have never laughed so much in my life.

Thanks and apologies go to Neil here at this point as he had to put up with my very quiet snoring! for a long time. Thanks Neil for helping me the night I woke feeling so ill, upset stomach, sweating and feeling awful. I thought I would have to go home in the morning. In the middle of the night, anxiety and panic can be a real bullies. You have to learn coping techniques and hope you win. It also did not help that I had torn my calf badly and was struggling to carry on feeling I was contributing fully to the work.

I decided to miss the next days work. It really ticked me off, as it was a glorious day and the team had the last day on the site also. Anyway sometimes you have to compromise. As you find in life you can always find a positive from what may seem such a negative thing. So, therefore I decided to clean out the gite and then hobble around the village.

When travelling I always try to take some A3 pics of some amazing trees that I have visited. That day I had in my rucksack some nice tree photos. I had already done lots of cultural integration in the bar with these photos and met lots of local folks. This day I visited the butchers I chatted to the wife and showed her the photos. She called her husband through from the back. M. Henry Manteau was a lovely chap, who loved the photos and especially the French ancient tree at Allouville Bellefosse with two chapels inside it! He then said he could take us on a tree hunting visit if he made some calls. So it was next day that we loaded into Henry's white Land rover.



Trouble in the back



The Tree hunters at work

All of us were excited as we were driven around the district. First Henry took us to see an enormous Sweet Chestnut in a private woodland. It was just under 7 metres girth and very special. It did need some trimming as it been allowed to go out of cycle. Most probably it will tear apart if not reduced in the near future (5 to 10 years). M. Henry said the owner does not care that much? It does seem to happen often. Money is the usual cause for this attitude.



We also did a BBC Radio Shropshire interview whilst out here promoting the project to a wider audience.

After the Sweet chestnut M. Henry took us through the grounds of a farm and into the woods to arrive at a lovely veteran Oak tree. This tree was in a very bad way, with various problems occurring. But at least it was not cut down. We all had pics took and measured it. I think it was 5.3m girth. Possibly over 300 years old. Similar in age to the Sweet Chestnut I guess.



We met the family who
owned the woodland and also the farm and gite.
M. Le Feuvre at Tranchemule

On the Thursday night we had a reception at the Reserve offices. I discussed tree hunting with Christian and showed everyone the photos again. Christian said he could take us to see some very nice trees.

Richard, Neil and I jumped in his car and off we went. He took us to a really special little area. It was an old track way that lead to a very old monastery. We found some great pollard Oaks on mounds running along this track. I think one oak was just under 6 metres girth. I guess getting on for 400 years old!



A nice old pollard Oak on the track bank.

Christian gets busy measuring.

Next we tried to visit another site by the very secretive communications base. Not a good place to be running around with a camera! Unfortunately the site had visitors there already and was private so we had to give up. Anyway it was worth the trip to see the first sites great trees.

These trees should go on to a Europe wide register of ancient trees. This project may happen in the coming years is what I am hearing from various people in the know. So, yes please put me down for some of that. Watch this space

On our return to England I took Mark to Sherborne station with the girls in tow. Yes and Emma did forget all of her bags. We went back.

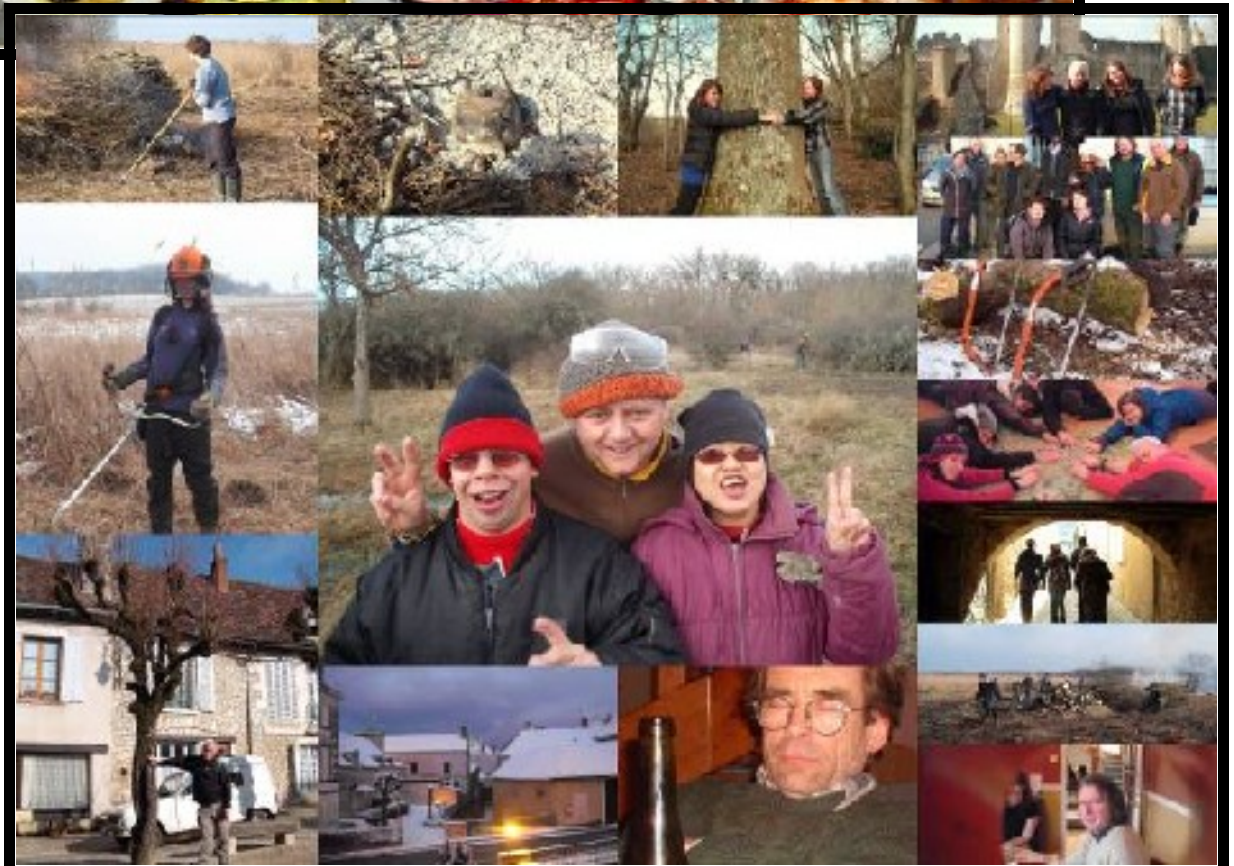


Anyway at the station we soon saw a pretty amazing tree as you can see. A London Plane I think. It is now on the Ancient Tree hunt website. Later in Birmingham the girls and I parted company. What a strange feeling it was to say goodbye to everyone.

I have a feeling we all felt the same, a little lost and missing the great group of people we had met. I for one had one of the best experiences of my life on this brilliant trip.

Thanks again Nigel and Kathy.

Just some nice things to remember...



Jokes and sayings

As a little diversion here is a list of some great jokes?? And a list of sayings put together by a few folks who could remember what typified our time at La Brenne. You can try to attribute who said what?

"CRANES"! "MARSH HARRIER"! "Water Tower" "Log Pile"
"Michael"! "Are those girls not down yet"?
Snoring and bad jokes
"Do boars have husks"?
"Je te kiffe" "tu me kiffe" 'Team Kiffe' "What's Epaule"
Tigers
"That's Bullshit man"! "Yah, yah"
Severine! #Rattling bog# #On Ilkley Morr#
"Tell them about the crocodile Mark"
FAing! Just need 10 mins FAing!
Dog/God
"Yes quite" Good at table football
Lad'n'dad"! "Tell them about the crayfish Mark" "Michael learns languages so quickly!"
Wee willy winky
"Extraordinary"! "Oh really" "Julien's word for phenomenal is...Michael"
Air guitar
Valentines Night meal yew we all had 'heartburn' wore our 'heart on our sleeves' and some of us were 'heart of hearing' bum bum
Filming Heather slicing her 25th birthday cake..."Cut'
#Frere Jaques#
Mate!
"when I was in Africa"
Coypu killer!
"Sooooaaaappp" "Rooooope"
LPO!
Billhook Pollarding
Light juggling Fire Poy?
Le see (Bow Saw); Grand secateurs (Loppers)
Le blageures Cultural integration
Jesus Christ
Eh em
"Michael, what do you think"?
"Smew"
Boggle champions Jenga
Blackthorn Willow Chocolat Chaud snow very cold bonfires kettles

Some lovely people we met:

Tony Williams; Joel; Julien; Christian; Jaques; Laura;
Manu; Sam, Emily, mum & dad, Vianney, Charlie, Vincent (photographer)
Dominique & Valerie at bar Le Belem
M. Henry Manteau (land rover tree hunter chap)
Nick & Julie? 'La Grande Fontaine'
Sorry if I forgot anyone. If anyone can remember any more good ones please let me know,
Perhaps we should compile a EuCAN joke book?

Trees found

English	French	Latin	Girth	Location
<i>Oak</i>	<i>Chene</i>	<i>Quercus sp.</i>	<i>3.77m</i>	<i>at Cistude lake</i>
<i>Ash</i>	<i>Cendre</i>	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	<i>3.40m</i>	<i>at Etang De la Mer Rouge car park</i>
<i>Oak</i>	<i>Chene</i>	<i>Quercus sp.</i>	<i>3.91m</i>	<i>on lake side Etang de la Mer Rouge</i>
<i>Lime</i>	<i>Tilleul</i>	<i>Tilia sp.</i>	<i>1.67m</i>	<i>Pollard ('Tetard') in Mez.</i>
<i>Sw.Chestnut</i>	<i>Chataignier</i>	<i>Casanea sativa</i>	<i>6.7m</i>	<i>in woodland nr Mez.</i>

Hundreds of lovely street pollards, Limes, tetard, trogues

Here are some nice links to interesting sites

Link to photos of the amazing Oak (Chene d'Alluoville Bellefosse) A Oak tree with TWO CHAPELS inside it in Normandy, France)

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/14919622@N02/sets/72157608980671429/>

Link to EuCAN La Brenne, France 2010 photographs.

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/14919622@N02/sets/72157624383286840/>

the Woodland trust's Ancient tree hunt.

www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk