



Newsletter
Spring 2018

Moor Trees

creating native woodland

Registered Office

Old School Centre
Totnes Road
South Brent
TQ10 9BP

Registered charity
No. 1081142

All change at Moor Trees! Chair of Trustees Janet Cotter explains



At Christmas, we said goodbye to Graham Burton, who has been the Director at Moor Trees for nearly 10 years. Whilst we were sad to say goodbye, Graham has not gone far away and is working with the Woodland Trust. We wish Graham all the very best in his new role and hope to be working with him in the future on local projects with the Woodland Trust.

Whilst without a Director, our trustees valiantly took on the essential roles of answering e-mails, and voicemails, organising the volunteer diary, paying the wages and bills and seeking high and low for a new Director. I want to say a very big 'thank you' to all our trustees for keeping the show on the road. I think all of us now realise how much background work there is to do, along with the actual planting of trees! I'm pleased to say we've managed and have also had a successful planting season ([see page 2](#)).

Our search for a new Director has been fruitful. We have been very lucky to appoint **Adam Owen** as the new Director. Adam comes to us with lots of experience of looking after trees and will be giving us a fresh outlook on our work.

A big warm welcome to Adam!

Adam Owen our new director introduces himself

Well hello! This is the bit where I introduce myself as your new Director of Moor Trees, so here's a bit of background:



P.S. I told you I hug old trees!

For seven years I was Chairman and Trustee for the Surrey Tree Warden Network (STWN). From this experience I feel I have a very firm understanding of the aims of **Moor Trees** and the challenges charities and the voluntary sector face. With the STWN we secured funding for projects, led volunteer task days and delivered training events. It was great fun and I've lost count of the number of veteran trees we discovered, hugged and measured; the number of trees we planted; and as ever with woodland management initiatives, the number of trees we cut down. However, I do understand at **Moor Trees** it is all about growing and planting trees, not felling them!

At the same time I was Parks and Countryside Manager for Guildford Borough Council working closely with Natural England, the Forestry Commission and Environment Agency, delivering conservation works in partnership. I frequently presented plans to local community groups, led guided walks and volunteer days, liaised with neighbouring authorities and landowners. I thoroughly enjoyed this community engagement.

After Guildford I joined Hampshire County Council as part of the Senior Management Team to develop business plans for five country parks. These plans helped secured £13 million of funding.

As Director for **Moor Trees** I am keen to improve the future of Dartmoor. **Moor Trees** has a vision and I intend to work with the many stakeholders in Dartmoor to promote the work of **Moor Trees** and ensure the vision can become a reality.

I very much look forward to meeting you all soon. *Adam Owen*



Wow, what a planting season! Record numbers of trees planted and a bit of crazy weather to boot.

Planting officer **John Brock** looks back on this year's busy tree planting season:



We began this year's tree planting back in December at **Upcott Grange Farm**, near Launceston. The site is owned by the wonderful Derek Gow, who specialises in reintroducing water voles and is also an expert in Beavers ([see article on pages 6 & 7](#)). Our intrepid volunteers braved classic West Devon rain and mud and more mud to plant 2300 locally native trees on 1.8 hectares. A truly fantastic effort in only 6 Sunday planting sessions.

A keen group of Buddhist volunteers staying in Devon on a retreat and led by Mark Wells planted 600 trees on the 13th and 14th of January to kick start our new planting site at **Longdown** near Exeter. In the following weeks, 3400 trees were planted on 2.7 hectares. Special thanks go to Schumacher college volunteers who were out in force to help us reach this goal. Many thanks also to Richard and Kate Morely, our superb hosts, who looked after us throughout, over and beyond, with fantastic home baking and a BBQ on the final day of planting! ([Richard is interviewed on page 4](#)).

On the last day of planting at Longdown Graham Burton visited us to say goodbye to the volunteers and to let us know how he is getting on in his new role at The Woodland Trust. We presented him with some gifts to say thank you for everything he's done for **Moor Trees** as director. The gifts including a beautiful hand turned bowl made by Colin Shazel and a scarf with the **Moor Trees** logo on. Although this was a chance to say goodbye, we hope to keep a close working relationship with Graham at the Woodland Trust.

In between our two main planting sites we also managed to plant 1300 trees at **Bidlake Manor** near Launceston. All the trees were planted by student volunteers from Plymouth University, a tremendous effort in only seven Wednesday afternoons.

As stated previously this has been a record breaking tree-planting season with 7,000 trees planted. A huge thank you to all our wonderful volunteers who made this all possible. Last but definitely not least, thanks to Brian Daniel and Jon Covey for all their hard work behind the scenes.

Onwards and upwards!



Muddy volunteers on the last day of planting at Upcott Grange Farm

Native trees we plant are:

Sessile oak, Pedunculate oak, Wych elm, Silver birch, Alder, Wild cherry, Hazel, Hawthorn, Blackthorn, Alder buckthorn, Spindle, Field maple, Goat willow, Guelder rose and Holly.



Volunteers from Plymouth University planted 1300 trees at Bidlake Manor.

Why do we enjoy planting trees? Dr. Janet Cotter has a theory...



Paul Harrison

Why do we go out in the wind and rain in the depths of winter to plant trees? What perverse pleasure do we get from getting muddy in order to plant trees?

The dedication of our volunteers coming out in all weathers to plant trees never ceases to amaze me. Is it Jon's cake? Or Brian's tea? I'm sure we wouldn't do it if it wasn't for the tree planting itself. But why do we enjoy planting trees so much?

When I ask people, I get a variety of replies. Some say it's to give something back to nature; some say they like planting something that will outlast them; some wish to offset their carbon footprint.

I have a theory that humans have a special affinity with trees. We connect with woodland differently to other ecosystems. For example, think of the passion of protestors against road building through woodland. Everyone feels sad when a tree is felled. I think the reason is in our DNA. Humans, especially children seem to have a natural inclination to climb trees.

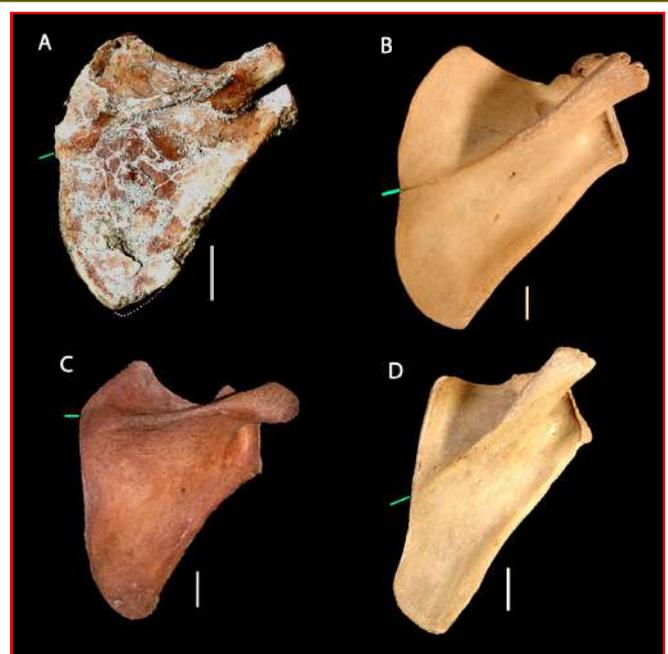
In evolution, humans split from apes, such as chimpanzees, 6 or 7 million years ago. Scientists have been tracing our evolutionary history using the shape of the shoulder blade. Modern human shoulder blades are very different shape from those of apes.

This change in shape tracks the change of early human behaviour as we gradually left the forest and started using tools. One shoulder from a fossil dating

to about 3 million years ago shows a mix of ape and modern human features (see picture). The shape of the shoulder blade indicates that the individual climbed trees, but also moved on two-legs and used tools. It appears we climbed down from the trees only relatively recently.

Our evolutionary history is closely associated with trees. Trees would have been essential to our ancestors, giving them food and shelter and fuel for fire. We would have been very grateful for trees. Perhaps it is that feeling which lingers in our psyche. Perhaps that is why we feel so satisfied at the end of a day's tree planting.

Because humans love trees.



Change in shape of the shoulder blade as humans left the trees and started using tools.

The ridge along the shoulder blade is much more horizontal in the modern human (C) than in the gorilla (B) or chimpanzee (D). In a fossil skeleton from Ethiopia (3.3 million years old) belonging to an early human, the shape of the shoulder blade is intermediary between those of modern human and ape. It is thought that this early human climbed trees, but also moved on two-legs and used tools. Scale bars = 1 cm.

Reprinted with permission from Springer Nature (Alemseged et al. 2006, Nature 443: 296-301).

**Richard and Kate Morley are the landowners at Longdown.
Naomi Wisbey took a break from planting trees to speak to Richard.**

I know how Moor Trees works from a volunteering perspective and have had a glimpse of some of the behind the scenes planning as a trustee. However I had very little idea about the landowner's experience of working with **Moor Trees**, which is why I wanted to hear about it from Richard.

Richard explained that the land we planted on has been in Kate's family for over 100 years. It was a small family dairy farm from around 1912 until Kate's great Uncle died in 1992. Between then and when Kate and Richard took over the land, it had been rented out to farmers for sheep grazing and had been cut back and artificially fertilised each year.

When Kate and Richard decided to replace the derelict house which was on the site and move in, their family and friends advised them they would need to carry on grazing sheep, as left ungrazed the land 'would be in a terrible state'. However, Richard is a conservationist and he told me that it has always been his dream to live in a house in the woods. Once they had the house Richard decided that they would plant the woods around it.



Kate, Richard and their daughter Ylva

Richard and Kate considered a couple of options to manage the land for wildlife and the environment; they thought

about having heritage breeds of livestock on the land in between copses of trees, but ultimately decided that would involve too much work and too many fences.

Richard knew that there are various arguments about the benefits of heritage breeds of livestock and different ways of managing the land in this way, but as Richard said, you can't argue with native woodland.

They also realised that with no input from themselves the land would eventually become native woodland. However, humans think in the relatively short terms of their lifetimes. Richard and Kate decided to help the process along, so that, even if the land was not mature native woodland in their lifetime, it would be during their daughter Ylva's life.

Kate and Richard had been planting native trees which they bought themselves from Perry Hale, the same nursery which **Moor Trees** buys some tree species from. They have planted 125 birches, 25 aspen and some rowan and willow trees, and have recently been able to start taking off spiral guards from birch trees they planted in 2012. Richard tells me there are beginning to be areas where you can't easily walk between the trees.

The plan was originally for Kate and Richard to plant all of the trees themselves, however when their daughter Ylva was born it became apparent that they did not have time to do this.

Although Richard was aware of **Moor Trees** through his conservation contacts, he was under the impression that we only planted trees on the high moor and he thought that the landowner would have to allow community access in order to get a government grant. It was Kate's idea to contact **Moor Trees**, to ask for some advice about how they could get the trees planted.

Graham Burton, as **Moor Trees** director came to visit in spring 2017 and told Kate and Richard that their land, close to Dartmoor, was exactly **Moor Trees'** preferred planting site. Graham assured Kate and Richard that he would do all of the paper-

work and apply for the forestry commission grant. I was hoping that Richard might be able to shed some light on the process of applying for a grant for me, but he told me that he was glad not to be involved in the frustrating bureaucracy of the paperwork.

I asked Richard if he and Kate had had to adapt their initial vision to fit in with the way **Moor Trees** plants trees. He replied that no, they always wanted to plant only native trees, and had no concerns about the planting density. The only regret he has, is that it is not possible to plant ash trees because of ash dieback disease. Instead we have used Hornbeam as a secondary canopy tree, after Oak.

Richard told me that he was looking forward to seeing the plants and wildlife change in response to the trees. Richard hopes that some of his neighbours might decide to also plant trees on their land. One of them has already asked him about it, and the valley might become wooded. The wooded Perridge Estate is just across the road from Kate's and Richard's land. He envisages that with a few aerial bridges small mammals such as pine martens could cross between the two woodlands.

A friend said to Richard 'wouldn't this look good with a pack of wolves running through it or a lynx or a visiting bear'. Richard thought 'don't be silly' but then he thought, well you have to start somewhere and at least the trees will be ready for when any wildlife arrives. He reflects that even if this wood remains isolated for many years at least he will have left this bit of land in better ecological condition than when he found it.



Wistman's Wood – examining the response of oak trees to climate in a special woodland

Volunteer, Trustee & PhD student Thomas Murphy recently presented his research into Wistman's Wood's relationship with climate change at the World Ecology Conference in Berlin. Below he gives us a flavour of his presentation:

Wistman's Wood is probably the most famous upland oak woodland on Dartmoor, and like the other two isolated upland woods (Black a Tor Copse and Piles Copse) is located on the west facing boulder covered slopes of an empty Dartmoor stream. Whilst the origin of the wood is still debated there is little argument as to its charm; Wistman's Wood inspires intrigue and romanticism in equal measure. As you walk past the emerald green moss-covered boulders, curtains of lichen festooning the hunched trees and ferns spring from almost every tree limb, it is difficult not to feel a sense of respect as well as a sense of excitement about what Dartmoor can be.

Upland oak woodlands are scientifically important as well as beautiful. They harbour a rich collection of mosses, liverworts and lichens as well as a unique combination of other plants and animals which make this type of woodland internationally recognised as ecologically important. One of these species is the rare lichen (*Graphina pauciloculata*) which is considered endemic to the UK (quite a rare thing), with over 50% of all sightings occurring on Dartmoor!



The increment borer is twisted into the trunk of the tree and then a 'core' cross section of the tree is pulled out to reveal the growth rings.

As part of my postgraduate research I decided to look at the response of the oak trees (*Quercus robur*) at Wistman's Wood to climate variables. The research could be important in the years ahead in helping us to understand the response of the wood to climate change.

With the permission of Natural England, I collected cores from 26 oak trees within the wood in July 2017 using an in-

crement borer (essentially a large apple corer). The cores come out as very thin (about 1cm in diameter) wooden cylinders revealing the growth rings from the bark to the heartwood of the tree. The trees are left healthy with no long term impact.

Once the cores are collected, they are dried and sanded smooth to make the growth rings clearer. The slow growing nature of the trees made identification of the rings difficult, meaning only six from 26 cores could be used to construct the 'master chronology', essentially an averaged ring width timeline of the cores used. This master chronology is known as a standardised ring width index and shows whether the trees were growing more or less than average for a particular year. Once the master-chronology was made it was compared to climate data for the area made available by the MET office.

One of the main factors impacting on European climate, particularly on the western coastal fringes (like Dartmoor), is the Atlantic Ocean. The North Atlantic Ocean experiences cycles known as the Atlantic Multi-decadal Oscillation (AMO index) which swings between warm and cool phases over a 60 year period. The warm phase is associated with wet and warm summer weather and the cool phase is characterised by drier sunnier weather. We are currently at the peak of the warm phase.

The results of my study show significant correlation between the North Atlantic sea surface temperature in spring and summer with the growth of the oak trees at Wistman's Wood. Isn't it great to think that the tree growth is influenced by oceanic cycles happening thousands of miles away in the depths of the Atlantic Ocean?

This type of relationship brings home the fundamental connection between ocean and land. If tree growth can be thought of as the lungs of the planet (breathing in carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen) then our planet's breathing is controlled by the cycles connected with the ocean's temperature. Next time you take a walk in Wistman's Wood think of the sea!

For those interested in finding out more I hope to publish a final report once the analysis is complete which I will provide to **Moor Trees**.

Happy tree planting,

Tom



Tom Murphy examines one of his oak cores from Wistman's Wood.

It's early spring in a Devon woodland...



Derek Gow, ecologist, farmer and expert in the reintroduction of native animal species presents an uplifting, informative and lyrical account of a rich and diverse ecology in which beavers have reclaimed their natural place.

It's early spring in a Devon woodland. The verdant green of the newly hatched leaves is so brightly luminescent it hurts to focus on their elfin splendour. Bluebells are flowering in their cobalt ranks. The soft butter yellow of the primroses is superseding the stronger sun drops of the fading celandines. Fleshy orchids of pastel puce erupt through the grasslands where the warm light strokes the soil. Although a plantation of only 20 years in its hedges, banks and boundaries a few old oaks remain. As the rhythms of the new season burst from their seasonal slumber not even the big trees can recognise the new beat of life thrumming through the forest. In a growing cacophony of gnawing, crashing, splashing, tinkling, cascading, mewing, crying and tail slapping, beavers are back!



Lottie O'Toole

Gnawed sticks with flute shaped ends lie stripped of their bark in tumbled clusters. Felled trees with pencil sharpened stumps lie silent in barely created clearings. Embankments raised by Victorian drainers become islands. Muddy paths worn by gigantic webbed feet lap canals which twist through the rush lands into the fields beyond.



Paul Harrison

Water. Water in pools. Deep, dark and ebony where they have been for a long time. Eerily translucent where the grasses and field flowers wave slowly in their last drowned dance in the bed of the new dams. Water in streams. Water flowing in broad blankets. Water slowly squelching. Sinking the land to form smelly, sphagnum, soaked sponges.

You will be lucky to see them as they float their gigantically, furred forms languidly through this drunken kingdom.



Paul Harrison

With their hoary, hippo heads on the surface they are ever alert for danger. They do not know that the bears, lynx or wolves are now all long gone and that the mesolithic hunters who left their flint knapped circles in the farmland above have also returned to the soil. Common frogs spawn where they have not for untold generations. Toads return in profusion to provide a bounteous repast for predators. Dragonflies dance across the surface while delicate blue damsels tremble on the reed stems in the gentlest of gusts. Wary water frogs squark stridently while amber eyed grey herons stalk stealthily in the shallows. Introduced water voles round and replete, indigenous grass snakes, little punk grebes, moorhens, ducks, geese and egrets all

exploit opportunities. Roe deer feed in the tall grass. Red foxes snooze in the sun. Insects of many, many kinds buzz, whirl and sing in their masses. **None of this is surprising for beavers bring life!**

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Trees felled coppice with ease sending their smooth, skinned shoots skyward. In their early lithe stages these contain an array of toxins to deter more unreasonable browsing for a time. Some take from cuttings when untidy feeding has swept them away to lodge on another silt bed. Some grow a metre in a single year when their seeds set in damp, wet ground. Some sucker out from their fallen mothers to form fragrant, forests of trembling offspring. Others respond ghoul-like when their dislocated limbs with hoary bark unstripped re-root to revive in unstoppable life. When trees do die in water they remain standing for years providing cosy bat roosts under their flaking bark or friable nest spaces in decaying heart wood for willow tits to hollow. Woodpeckers thoroughly pock their carcasses for burrowing insects and by doing so provide dwellings for squirrels or for nook nesting owls. Where they topple on land they afford refugia for small mammals whose unwitting seed stashes widely burst forth as complete carpets of seedlings. When they crash in the deep fish shoals float through their canopies to avoid gobbling cormorants and sleek, swimming otters.



It's an ignorance that beavers kill trees. While misplaced plantations of alien conifers may be drowned by their structures, the truth is the opposite, for broadleaved trees their relationship, nuanced over millions of years, has blossomed Ent-like into the most superlative of propagators and sophisticated of gardeners. Although we in our dumbness of silence can't hear the life pulse of their presence, our woods and wetlands know it well. It is an ancient beat which once defibrillated by us will drum with the greatest of power to the joy of the life forms these environments sustain. **Welcome back old friend! Your time has truly come!**

It's an ignorance that beavers kill trees

Derek Gow has worked with Beavers since 1994 when he organised the first import of Eurasian beavers to Britain from the Polish Academy of Sciences breeding farm at Popielno. Since then he has advised the statutory restoration process for this species in Scotland, England and Wales. He has travelled widely to see beaver generated landscapes from Western Oregon to Russia. He has written many articles regarding the species and was a co-author of the recent Mammal Society field guide to beavers.

Do your bit for the environment!

Volunteer with Moor Trees!

Make a donation!

Buy a tree dedication to mark that special occasion!

£15 for 1 tree; £50 for 5 trees; £100 for 20 trees

Become a member!

Low income: £8; Individual £15; Family: £20; Life: £150

Make a gift in your will!

Become a Carbon Partner!

All details on the Moor Trees website: www.moortrees.org

"I have always found thick woods a little intimidating, for they are so secret and enclosed. You may seem alone but you are not, for there are always eyes watching you. All the wildlife of the woods, the insects, birds, and animals, are well aware of your presence no matter how softly you may tread, and they follow your every move although you cannot see them."

Thalassa Cruso

horticulturalist and author



Paul Harrison

Moor Trees

Old School Centre
Totnes Road
South Brent
Devon
TQ10 9BP

PHONE:
01364 649277

E-MAIL:
info@moortrees.org

Visit our website
at
www.moortrees.org

Registered charity number
1081142

About Moor Trees

Our staff:

Adam Owen	Director
Brian Daniel	Project Officer
Jon Brock	Tree & Volunteer Officer
Jon Covey	Broadley Nursery Officer
Paul Harrison	Newsletter Editor & Tree Dedications
Naomi Wisbey	Newsletter co-editor

Our trustees:

Janet Cotter (Chair)	Jon Covey
Guy Gilmore (Secretary & Treasurer)	Naomi Wisbey
Jill Broom	Tom Murphy
Paul Harrison	Tim Ferry

Our patrons:

Sir Jonathon Porritt
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Pen Hadow (Polar explorer)
Alan Watson Featherstone (ecologist)

Edited by Paul Harrison and Naomi Wisbey

Printed on paper from FSC mixed sources by the print workshop at HMP Dartmoor

