

Bringing Woodlands to Life

Smallwoods

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Permission
for huts
Managing
woods for
diversity



Pulling Force

Mike Gardner extracts felled and hung-up trees from woodlands by winch and rope


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Mike Gardner showing woodland owners how to extract trees at The Hillyfield in Devon

Extracting Trees

On a Devon woodland farm Nick Gibbs follows courses on moving wood

In January Doug King-Smith welcomed woodland owners to 18ha (45-acre) The Hillyfield in Devon to learn about extracting trees from woodlands. Split into two sessions before and after lunch, the Timber Extraction from Small Woodlands day introduced participants to horse logging, taught by Will Hampton, and to the challenges of removing lengths of wood with Mike Gardner, who manages the Dartington Estate and other private woodlands across the South. He also runs Woodmanship, and further business called Gardner Woodland Consultancy. Though of course many owners will be tempted by horse logging, with the benefits of less damage and easier selection, I found the lessons learnt about choking, winching and skidding fallen trees particularly valuable as a woodland owner, though Doug says that some of the participants found it the other way round, and one has already asked about employing Will to do some horse logging.

With so much attention paid to felling, it is easy to ignore the significance of extraction. "It is mostly about pulling things," explained Mike Gardner as he introduced a group to choking trees with a chain. "Wood," he warned, "has a mind of its own." To start with he showed how a cant hook, or Peavey, is used to rotate and move logs, ideally laid on racks to reduce friction.

Choking

Whatever method you choose to move wood, it is wise to understand the basics of using a chain to choke around the log, a cable for pulling, and a block and post to allow users to alter the direction of pull. Mike explained how dangerous the use of a winch can be, and how operators have to carefully positioning themselves to avoid any breakages or snaps, or uncontrollable logs that could crush someone. He showed how to position a chain so that the links don't drop out of the open portion of the hook when you rotate a log. Mike favours an 8 tonne snatch block to take 16mm cable, with opening cheeks so that you

don't have to waste time feeding the full length of cable through the block. "Don't try using small rope," he explained, "as it will get stuck in the pulley. Cable can also be damaged by the curve of the pulley, or wear for other reasons." Aligning cables on a winch inaccurately can be damaging, especially as they have memory and can be ruined quickly.

Winch safety

Opening the rear door of his 4x4, Mike reinforced the maxim that winches and other tools should be secured within your vehicle so there is reduced risk of being hit by flying hardware when you brake hard. Bars should be stored across the line of a car or quad bike so they are less likely to spear the driver and passengers. "Keep out of line of the winch in case it snaps," Mike added, commenting that remote winch controls encourage you to watch and operate from a safe location, where you won't be hit by cable or wood.

Moving up a track through Doug's steep woodland, Mike started discussing with owners the best way to fell and extract trees on a slope for efficiency and safety, with straight pulls being easiest. The use of snatch blocks was discussed with the need for safe anchor points reinforced. The need for proper training in tree felling, driving tractors and quad bikes in the woods and using winches was also recommended.

Slope felling

When it comes to working on hills, Mike tends to prefer felling trees up hills as it is less far for the trees to fall. Winching up hill is also easier as it is simpler pulling the winching rope downhill from the tractor to the tree than uphill to the tree from the tractor. Felling across a slope can be dangerous as the truck or tractor or quad bike won't work well at an angle, though Doug comments that it can be sensible to fell across a slope if you have narrow tracks to work from as the angle of incidence between tractor and tree can be 30° at a maximum, otherwise you risk pulling over your tractor when winching. In

order to extract a tree straight down a hill, he adds, you would either have to reverse directly to the hill, meaning the need for a wide track, or employ a snatch block to a fixed anchor point.

You have to plan the order of felling carefully so that the distance between felled and standing trees is left long enough to attach a snatch block. Watch out, he commented, that you don't rely on a tree that might itself fall once you start using it as an anchor. Look at the crown to judge its healthiness, and take care not to use trees lacking strong foundations. You can tell if a tree is dying or alive by realising that conifers grow against gravity and broadleaves towards light. "If you keep on pulling," he noted, "something will break."

Hung-up trees

Further into the woodland, Mike spent some time discussing hung-up trees, and how they can be extracted safely. "Pulling the bottom is the simplest way," and he illustrated this by encouraging participants to have a go themselves. Using a small Tirlor winch attached to another tree with a strop, and clearing the path along which the tree's base would be pulled, owners sampled the experience of bringing a dangerous oak down to earth and out of the branches of a neighbour.

Details Timber Extraction from Small Woodlands was organised by Wood Land Culture, and aided by RDPE funding offering subsidised places. Further courses in January included one on Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP), and how they can diversify woodland income.

The Hillyfield continues its journey of dealing with *Phytophthora ramorum*. If you want to gain experience in felling and extracting timber and help out at this beautiful woodland farm in Devon then visit www.thehillyfield.co.uk or Facebook at The Hillyfield Woodland Farm on Dartmoor, or get in touch with Doug as he has lots of work to be done. Learn more about Mike Gardner's work at www.woodmanship.co.uk, and about Will Hampton's horse logging at www.dartmoorhorseloggers.co.uk.



Mike Gardner discussing the strength of a tree with exposed roots on a track



Will Hampton showed participants an Ulvens trailer for pulling logs, before they went off for a great lunch (below)





Doug King-Smith of The Hillyfield beside an enclosed quartz, which is typical of stones around his woodland farm. Mike Gardner (right) discussing a tree on a bank with participants



Mike Gardner showing how to use a cant hook, with logs laid out on beams to make moving easier (above). He positioned a snatch block (left) on a bar with string just to show the safe way to position winches and cables when pulling logs. He favours a snatch block with removable cheeks so that a rope or cable can be inserted more easily. Mike also added that signs are important in a woodland as visitors may appear on a footpath (below)



A small Tifor winch (above) about to be used for pulling back the bottom of a hung-up tree. Mike carries various wedges (below), but the steel ones can damage a chainsaw

