FOAL HURST WOOD
LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

NEWSletter

Issue No 193 October 2021

Happy Autumn, A New Beginning…

On the 26th September we had our first Volunteers' day in Foal Hurst Wood Nature Reserve. For the previous three weeks Ray, Mark and I had been working the area but had only just scratched the surface of the work. The 26th was a warm but cloudy day and eleven people turned up.

Much work was achieved clearing brush and small trees in the new coppice area. Some people left just after tea but most stayed until lunch. Thank you to everyone who came and I hope you all had an enjoyable time.

Unfortunately, Ray had a slight fall and hurt his wrist which prevented him chain sawing after the event. The sprain does not seem too serious but will still put him out of work for a couple of weeks. Get well soon, Ray.

On the 27th of August the Flower Meadow was mown. Simone and I started to rake off the grass almost immediately but it was very hard work because the cut was not even. It took us two weeks, working two hours a day, to rake and lift the cuttings.

There was a fallow deer stag with six points in velvet in the far corner of the Flower Meadow on the 30th August. We studied each other for a short while before he decided he didn't want to become acquainted with me. He fled across the ditch into the building site.

On September 18th I planted several trees in last season's coppice area. Most were oaks but I did plant a willow, a maple and a cherry too. They were all still alive on the 22nd when I watered them again. I have several more trees to go in the coppice area we are starting now. They will be planted in January or February.

I have been meaning to write up a set of "how to" notes for the volunteers to study so this month I thought I would start by describing how to cut down a tree and how to build a log pile, both of which, if done wrongly can prove to be dangerous.

Tree felling. When cutting down a tree, the first thing to do is work out which way the tree wants to fall and if it will fall cleanly or become snagged in another tree. If the tree is likely to become snagged then select another tree, preferably one that will not become snagged. Finding the direction of fall can be quite easy if the tree has a distinct lean. If not, the direction will be determined by one side or the other having the most weight at the top, or if the tree is uniform, it could be decided by the wind direction.

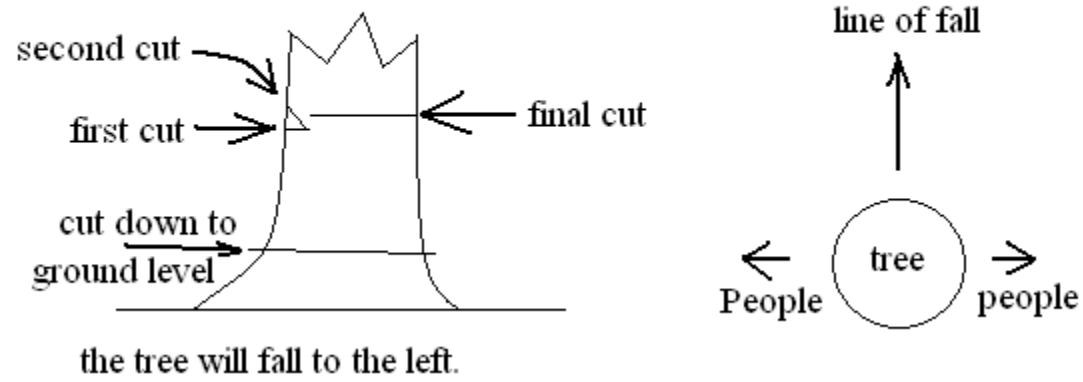
It is very important to make sure that there is nobody in the line of fall. Make sure all other people stand well away to the sides of where you are cutting and **warn them** if they are moving about.

The next step is to make two cuts on the side of the tree where you are aiming for the tree to fall. If the tree is crooked there may be a big difference in the direction of fall depending on how high up the trunk you cut. The first cut should be horizontal about a quarter of the way into the tree. The second cut should be above and sloping down to meet the first. When the two cuts meet, a wedge of wood will come out. This can sometimes be used as a wedge for the log pile.

The final cut should be horizontal on the side of the tree away from the fall, **about a centimetre above the first cut**.(see diagram A) As soon as the tree starts to fall, step away **to the side**.
Finally, once the tree is down, you will find several spiky bits sticking up where the cuts meet. These must be removed, usually by cutting the stump down to ground level. If the stump is already at ground level, clip off the spikes with loppers etc.

Cutting down a tree.

diagram A



When the tree has been felled there are many ways it may need to be disposed of. These involve only about four cut types. If the tree has fallen to the ground, take off the branches with loppers or a saw before cutting the trunk into logs. If the branch is supported only by the trunk, cut the branch from above.

If the branch is supported at both ends because it is leaning on another tree or on the ground, cut from beneath, otherwise it will pinch. Likewise, if the tree trunk is not leaning, cut a nick underneath and then cut all the way through from the top. If the trunk is leaning, cut a nick on top and then cut all the way through from beneath. (See diagram B) Bear in mind that the item you are going to cut may need to be moved in order to make either the nick or the main cut or both. It may just have to be rolled over to accomplish this. If the trunk is heavy, find someone to help move it. Cut the trunk into manageable lengths bearing in mind the thicker the trunk the heavier it will be per foot length. A log two feet thick but only one foot long will be almost as heavy as a log one foot thick but four feet long.

If the tree becomes snagged and does not fall to the ground it must still be disposed of using the techniques above. First, cut the trunk into sections until either the tree falls naturally or it can be manhandled to the ground. Manhandling is not always possible so it is better not to become snagged in the first place. However, sometimes snagging cannot be avoided because occasionally trees do not go where you expect them to go. Once the tree is down proceed as normal.

diagram B

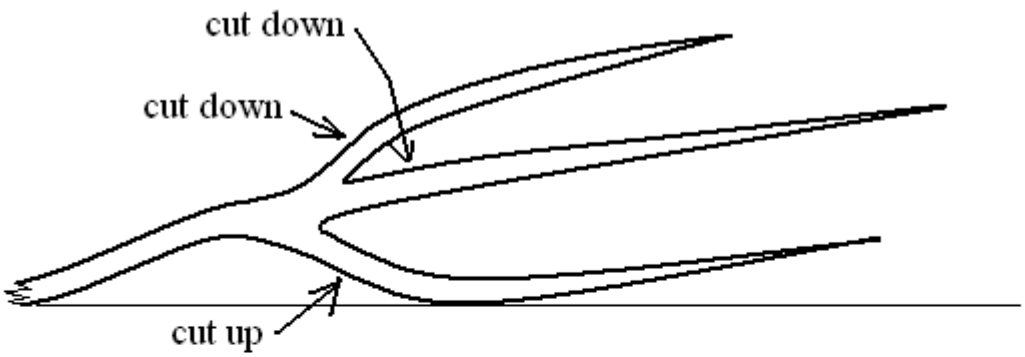
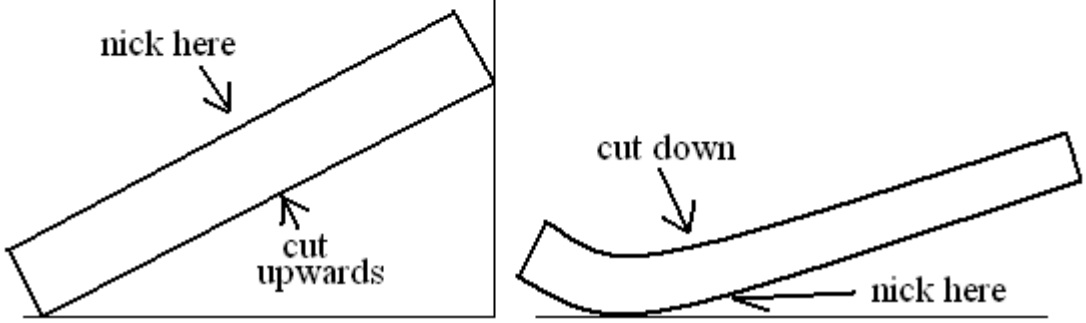
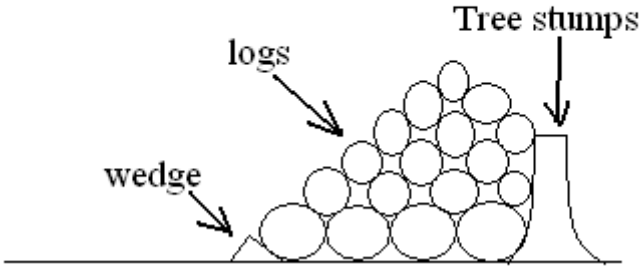


Diagram C



Building a log pile. For all log piles, the logs should be straight but slight curves may be acceptable. The easiest method for building a log pile is to find two stumps and lay your logs against them with the large logs at the bottom. Place wedges against the last logs on the ground so they do not roll when you place more logs on top. If you don't have a suitable wedge, you can always make one from one of the logs. Reducing the size of log as the pile grows higher. Use logs of approximately equal length and cut off any excess that protrudes from the general shape. It is also advisable to keep the log pile quite small not exceeding about a metre high. (See diagram 1)

diagram 1



The second method is better in that a much more substantial pile can be built but it is still advisable to keep the height limited to about a metre. I will demonstrate this on the next volunteers' day.

First select an area of flat land. If there is a slight slope this can be used but the logs must be placed across the slope not up and down the slope. Place a single substantial log across the slope at the bottom end of the incline. Support the log with at least two wedges under the downhill side. Place two or more equal length logs resting one end on the first log with the remaining length lying up the hill if there is one. The steeper the slope the shorter these logs have to be so that they always create a < shape with the slope.

If the ground is flat, repeat the construction of the first three logs so you have a shallow bowl shape. The two constructs can be as far apart as you think you will need for the number of logs you have to stack. (See diagram 2 and 3)

diagram 2

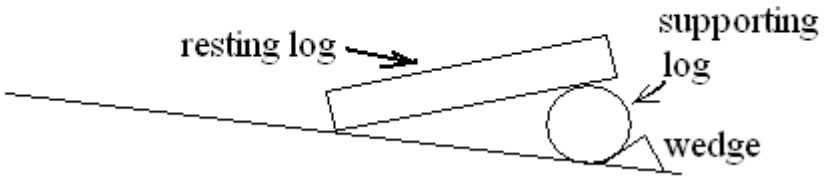
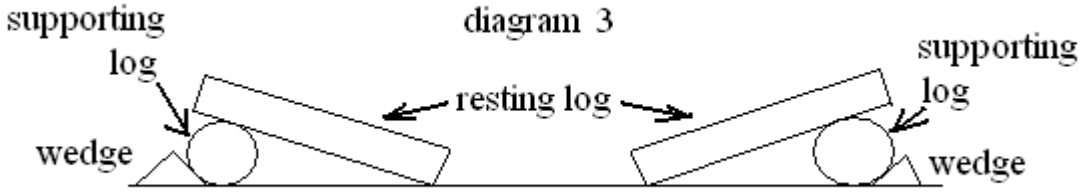
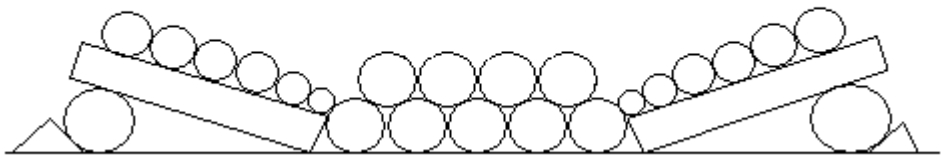


diagram 3



Now infill the area between the two constructs with large logs at the bottom and smaller logs higher up for about three levels. Over the actual constructs the first row of logs are laid the other way around with small logs at the bottom and larger ones at the top of the slope. This helps funnel everything to the centre of the pile. (See diagram 4)

diagram 4



Once you have reached this stage you can continue with larger logs to the middle and smaller logs to the outside until the pile is full. Do not place logs directly over or outside the supporting logs or the pile may end up collapsing when the logs have rotted.

The next Volunteers' day will be Sunday October 31st when we will be doing more of the same. See you all in the car park at 09.30. Remember that the clocks change and wintertime will once again be in force from that Sunday morning. 9am becomes 8am.

Have a Comfortable Lie In.

Peter Prince

Any News?

Items for the next Issue by
5th November please, to:-
80 Forest Road, Paddock Wood, Kent
TN12 6JX
email b.mace452@btinternet.com