

Community Trees Handbook

Case Study : Cornwall

Two community woodland initiatives in West Cornwall show how woodlands can be places for bringing people together to achieve great benefits, improving both the quality of the local environment and people's health and well-being.

Steeple Woodlands, St. Ives

On the outskirts of the holiday town of St Ives an area of former heathland and woodland has been the site of great activity by local people over the past decade, although few summer visitors to the area are likely to notice it. The Steeple Woodlands project has its origins in a letter in the local press. The letter was written by a local doctor, Rupert Manley, who also happened to be the parish tree warden. In it he asked if other local people would be interested in setting up a community woodland. He had in mind an area that had been used for tin and copper mines which had recently been cleared of invasive rhododendron by the local district council with the benefit of a derelict land restoration grant.

The response was overwhelmingly positive. With the support of the district council and BTCV, a project group was established and a plan developed for clearing a large area of rhododendron scrub, the planting of trees, and restoration of traditional heathland. The site, some of which contains wood pasture and pollarded oaks over 200 years old, was subsequently recognised as a Local Nature Reserve. It has won numerous awards over the years and became the first 'green gym' to be established in the region.



The project group has benefited from diverse array of funding over the years, including from European funding and more recently from the Heritage Lottery Fund. An attractive annual calendar with scenes from the woodland has been produced in recent years in part with sponsorship provided by local businesses.

Hundreds of volunteers have been involved in the often challenging work over the years, including many people referred by the local doctors' surgery for the health benefits such work brings. An annual springtime festival with musicians and dancers associated with the Knills Monument, which gives its name to Steeple Woodlands, attracts hundreds of local residents and schoolchildren. Thanks to years of hard work by dedicated volunteers, the local community are now better able to appreciate the qualities of the adjacent woodland and the stunning views it offers of the town and coastline.



Websites:

www.stivescornwallblog.co.uk/2009/05/steeple-woodland-nature-reserve.html

Crenver Grove

Just a few miles east of St Ives, near Praz-an-Beeble, the Crenver Grove woodland is one of very few large stands of old estate forest left in West Cornwall. When threatened with development by a timeshare company around 10 years ago, local people got together to fundraise to purchase the area to stop it from being destroyed. With the support of the Dandelion Trust the campaign secured the site which has since been looked after by the locally based Sustainable Trust set up and led by an energetic individual, Pip Richards, who spearheaded the local campaign.



Crenver Grove now has a bright future and has become the location for many enjoyable community activities. Over the years, local people, including special needs groups, ex-offenders and local unemployed or homeless youth, have been involved in building a small bridge over damp ditches which cross the woodland, clearing rhododendron and other invasive shrubs, charcoal burning (which has provided a small income for the group), making wood shingles, and maintaining the imposing stone wall which bounds much of the land. A local ironworker was commissioned to make an entrance arch to the woodland.

Kids from Camborne, who may never have been to the sea a couple of miles away, can come here to mess around and get muddy in this natural playground. They may also learn woodcraft skills. There is now a training course for Forest School teaching here. It has recently benefited from the construction of a beautiful, traditional cruck barn which

was built as part of a workshop in traditional wood construction led by Jamie Lovekin. Good value public liability insurance from the Rural Arbour Product group, paid for by the Dandelion Trust, has provided cover for these activities and peace of mind for the organisers.

Emboldened by its successes at Crenver Grove, the Sustainable Trust has recently started another local project to look after and promote understanding of the Devil's Quoit another hitherto undervalued local landmark.

Websites:

www.sustrust.co.uk/

www.dandeliontrust.org/

