

Ironbridge Woodland Products

Linking people and woodland through timber processing



Introduction

The Ironbridge Woodland Products project is an excellent way for students to appreciate the importance of the trees and woods on their doorstep. The involvement of people in the felling, milling and then processing of high quality hardwood timber in to a finished product ensures that participants gain a detailed understanding of the economic and environmental values of sustainably managed woods.

Project partners

Ercall Wood Technology College • Severn Gorge Countryside Trust
Ironbridge CARE community • Queen Alexander College
Madeley Court School • William Brookes School

Objectives

- ◆ To engage a wide range of people from local schools and training centres in the processing of timber from the Severn Gorge Countryside Trust's woodlands
- ◆ To demonstrate the economic and environmental values of these local woods
- ◆ To demonstrate the benefits of sustainable woodland management
- ◆ To demonstrate the potential of locally grown timber

Description

The Severn Gorge Countryside Trust manages most of the woodland in the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site. The woodlands cloak the steep valley sides above the River Severn and are managed under the principles of Continuous Cover Forestry and are certified under the Soil Association's 'Woodmark' standard. The underlying philosophy is small-scale, low-impact working.

As well as public access, nature conservation, archaeology and landscape objectives, the Trust involves people in all aspects of its work. Ironbridge Woodland Products is a key element of this strategy.

Project design

Ironbridge Woodland Products aims to engage people in their local woods through donations of timber to local schools and training centres. While some of those participating will have explored the Trust's woods, many will have not done so. By

converting rough-cut blanks with the bark still attached into CD racks, bird tables and benches, participants learn the full value of their local woods.

Implementation

The project was launched in 2000 with grant aid of £6,700 from the Forestry Commission.

Five years later, the project is still going strong and the original three partner organisations have now been increased to five, with the Trust donating timber to each of these annually.

Ironbridge Woodland Products is now integral to the Trust's woodland management programmes and since its inception, the Trust has donated some £10,000 worth of timber to its partners.

Queen Alexandra College is a national specialist college in Birmingham for visually impaired people. Their students have used air-dried ash and sycamore for cabinet making and sweet chestnut for outdoor furniture.





At Ercall Wood Technology College, students work with rough-cut planks and convert them into high quality CD holders and other storage systems as part of their GCSE projects.

The Trust works particularly closely with the CARE community in Ironbridge and, as with other groups, has organised site visits. In all cases, the link to local woodland is extremely important and the participating groups really appreciate the opportunity to see the logs being sawn into planks on the mobile sawmill.

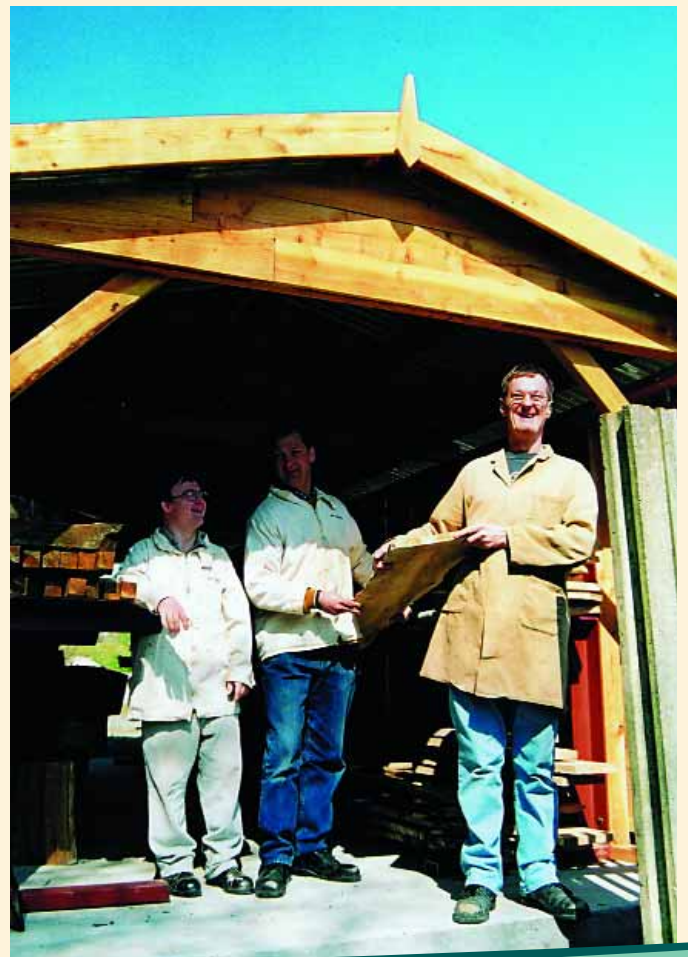
On-site demonstrations are an extremely important part of the project and, where appropriate, other opportunities to consolidate the links between trees and people are taken up. In the case of CARE, this link was further explored through the erection of dormouse nesting boxes on Trust land. The boxes had been made by CARE with timber donated by the Trust.

The Trust has also worked closely with CARE to erect a purpose-built timber store that enables the group to air dry their timber and store sufficient to ensure that the workshop has a ready supply of timber. This relationship has recently developed further with the establishment of Chain of Custody for the products that are sold by CARE. This labelling clearly demonstrates the relationship between the bird tables, bowls and garden seats sold by CARE and local, sustainably managed woodland.

In addition to its five partners, the Trust also uses a variety of other opportunities to promote the philosophy behind Ironbridge Woodland Products. These have included one-off donations to local organisations such as the Green Wood Centre, Shropshire Wildlife Trust and Dark Lane Pre-school. The Trust has also supported community events such as Madeley Green Day where Trust timber was milled and made into bird boxes by members of the public. These and many other similar events are ideal opportunities to demonstrate the links between trees and people.

Achievements and outputs

The project has been an enormous success. It has involved people in trees and woodland in an unusual and refreshing way and several hundred people have already taken part in the five years since the project's inception. This number will continue to grow as the project continues to develop and evolve.



Future management and sustainability

This project is seen by the Trust as a key means for involving and informing people about its work and aspirations. Looking to the future, the Trust has, therefore, made a firm commitment to continue to support and develop Ironbridge Woodland Products. In consequence, the Trust has absorbed the project into its core programmes and will continue to work with local partners on its successful delivery.

Wider application

The investment of resources into Ironbridge Woodland Products has resulted in the participation of many hundreds of people in the trees and woods of the Ironbridge Gorge in a very short space of time. Their involvement has been in a very unique and unusual way. The project is readily sustainable for the Trust and will, therefore, continue to achieve results for many years to come. It is, therefore, an ideal model for others to consider adopting.

This project delivers against the following themes of the West Midlands Regional Forestry Framework:

Woodland Cover
The Woodland & Forestry industry
Wood Energy
Recycling
Recreation & Tourism
Health & Wellbeing
Education, Learning & Skills
Fostering Social Inclusion
Enhancing Biodiversity
Natural & Cultural Environmental benefits
Supporting the Regeneration of the West Midlands



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Further reading

Contact the Severn Gorge Countryside Trust for their annual review or visit the Trust's website at:
www.severngorge.org.uk