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## **Report from the Chairman** **Colin Hall**

### **Trees for connoisseurs**

The last 12 months have seen more steady progress for the Tree Register. We had many new champion trees recorded and we added considerable new data to the Register. Our excellent website continued to spread the word. Earlier this year we launched the hunt for the tallest tree in the British Isles, finding 3 trees over 200 ft, with only 3 ft between them. See Registrar's Report page 5.

### **Westonbirt**

Members at Westonbirt 2001



A highlight of the year was the successful 2001 Alan Mitchell Lecture, which was given in April by Roy Lancaster at Westonbirt Arboretum in Gloucestershire. The tickets for this event were quickly sold out and some 100 members arrived on a fresh, sunny afternoon at the arboretum for the guided walks led by Hugh Angus and Tony Butler. Later, guests assembled for drinks and a buffet in the Great Oak Hall and there was keen bidding in the Silent Tree Auction for many rare trees and bushes, which had been kindly donated by supporters and many of which had been raised from wild collected seed. Roy then entertained us with his lively

lecture on "Trees for Connoisseurs" enhanced by superb photos he had taken over the years.

We are most grateful to Roy Lancaster, Hugh Angus and Tony Butler and Maurice Foster, Harry Hay, Chris Carnegan and Westonbirt staff who provided plants, and helped with the silent auction and to the Friends of Westonbirt who allowed us to use the Hall.

### **2003 Lecture**

The next Alan Mitchell Lecture will be in April 2003, given by Ted Green, the founder of The Ancient Tree Forum, at Windsor Great Park. Further details will be circulated later in the year.

### **Ancient Tree Project**

We are currently discussing with the Woodland Trust a collaborative project which will involve the building of a comprehensive on-line database of our ancient trees. The project will provide an essential foundation for conservation work and widen public appreciation of our magnificent tree heritage. I hope to let you know more about this exciting project on our website and in the next newsletter

The tallest recorded Grecian fir (*Abies cephalonica*) 41m at Bickton BG, Devon. (Bickton BG)  
See Tree news from the regions.

### **New Trustee and Membership Secretary**

I am delighted to be able to tell you that Roy Lancaster has agreed to become a trustee of The Tree Register. Roy has a lifetime experience of travelling the world in search of plants and over the 30 years since his first expedition to Nepal in 1971 he has led botanical explorations and tours in China, Russia, the Himalayas, New Zealand, USA and Europe. He is author of many books on plant exploration and horticulture, a journalist and



a broadcaster on both radio and TV as well as a garden consultant and advisor. His wealth of first-hand knowledge and experience of trees allied to his untiring enthusiasm for all plants will be an enormous asset to the Tree Register and contribute significantly to our progress in the future.

We are also pleased to welcome Philippa Allen as our new membership secretary.

## Thank You

Our thanks go to David Alderman, our registrar, Owen Johnson, our assistant registrar who is also writing our new champion tree book, Pamela Stevenson, our secretary, and to all our tree measurers for their continued dedication and support. Finally, I would like to thank all our members for their continuing support.

## Registrars Report David Alderman

### A tale of tall trees

Evening view from Randolph's Leap

The snow on the A9 through the Cairngorm Mountains was left far behind as we reached Ferness and met Jim Paterson in glorious early evening sunshine. Chic Henderson, photographer and driver for the trip had collected me from Edinburgh airport after a deluge of hailstones, so we were prepared for anything! Our objective? To measure the tallest trees in Scotland using the same instruments and the same methods, to compare and discover our tallest tree. With light fading fast, Jim led us to Randolph's Leap on the River Findhorn. Walking past the stone marking high water level during the great flood of August 1829 we came to two quite remarkable trees. A Douglas fir and Sitka spruce planted originally 20ft apart with the spruce now perilously close to the edge of the river. The water had clearly been up and around the base of the trees as the silty sand was smooth and untouched. A repeat of the 1829 flood would be devastating to these trees. Our target was anything over 60m and the first snap shot measurements suggested both trees to be within the range 57-59m. Looking from the vantage point of Randolph's Leap itself, a huge rock at a narrowing in the river, we measured the Sitka to be 57.5m and although the lowest part of the trunk was obscured by scrub and seedlings, not bad from a range of 154m! If we had known then the fate of the tallest Sitka we were to visit later, we would have spent longer, but as Chic took a final photo of the two magnificent David Douglas trees we headed for Nairn and supper.



## Castle Leod

The night blew up a gale with sleet and driving rain. By morning the worst weather had blown over but the forecast remained strong winds. Not ideal, with time against us, we headed for Castle Leod first, hoping for calmer weather later in the day at Moniack Glen. John McKenzie, Earl of Cromarty, greeted us cheerfully at Castle Leod. The Castle will be open to the public from May 2002 and he was keen to update measurements of the "tallest" Sequoiadendron giganteum.



Castle Leod beyond the 1550 Sweet chestnut

Using the standard clinometer 53m can be recorded from the Castle side. The tree must lean slightly that way, as lower measurements were recorded on the opposite side. Using the laser rangefinder we somewhat reluctantly settled on an average of 51m. A disappointment, even though Sequoiadendron of 50m are rare in Britain and this was certainly the tallest I had personally recorded.

## Moniack Glen

Moniack Glen appears out of nowhere. One minute you can hardly believe you are within distance of tall trees and the next you are walking up a picturesque burn with trees towering high above, becoming taller and taller the further you walk. This creates a majestic beauty but one quickly becomes complacent at seeing so many trees over 50m. You have to keep such a place in perspective. Nevertheless, a 54m Douglas is dismissed with near disdain and a 57m tree has Jim marching off for the taller specimens he brought to the Forestry Commissions notice many years ago. On a flat near the top of the walk is a group of very tall trees. For consistent comparison we had to record the tallest trees

from at least four different points of the compass. In the case of Moniack, this involved clambering up a steep bank, dangerous in the wet weather. From the best level view the clinometer and hypsometer recorded 63-64m. Every measurement we obtained with the laser rangefinder was over 60m, but with the wind blowing the tip 3-4m either way it was difficult hitting the target. Where the base of the tree was obscured we calculated our distance from the tree with an ultra-sonic hypsometer. With rain lashing down we had to abandon our efforts prematurely but settled for an average height of 62m.

### Notable Sitka spruce

Sitka spruce grove at Doune House



We headed south through snow, replaced by rain by the time we reached Doune House, Rothiemurchus. Here Jim showed us a grove of very fine Sitka spruce. Two trees were recorded as notable by John McLean in the 1950's and we found one still with his painted number of "280" on its trunk. We were again looking for trees 59-60m in height. With a strong westerly blowing it was easy to record 59m on the east side with a clinometer. The rangefinder reduced this to 56-57m but the trees, like us, were rarely upright. This was not satisfactory and after 45 minutes persevering we could not confirm whether the trees were taller than the one at Randolph's Leap. We were just grateful to get back in the car.

### The Hermitage

Clearing skies greeted us at The Hermitage near Dunkeld for another glorious sunny and calm evening. Ideal conditions. From the notice board proclaiming the tallest tree a height again of 63m for this now historic Douglas fir was recorded on Jim's hypsometer. The tree here has a more obvious lean downstream and using the laser we possibly recorded the first measurement from an upstream position. Other measurements included sliding down snow covered banks and rock hopping downstream. We agreed with Derrick Holdsworth's earlier laser measurement of 58.5m, although our total measurements averaged closer to 59m. We calculated that if the tree was vertical it would be unlikely to be more than 59.5m from tip to ground level on the uppermost side, a point where such a tree would have to be felled. Recording to the lowest point on the riverbank side with its exposed rooting gives an unrealistic height of 62m. The Hermitage tree was therefore out of contention, but how many 59m trees do you usually see in a day?

### Huge Sequoiadendron

Sequoiadendron giganteum at Strathearn



A night in Comrie was not the greatest experience but the clear morning sky and promise of good weather for the rest of the week had us in good cheer. Jim directed us to a private estate at Strathearn, owned by Americans who were away, but we were warmly greeted and shown, with some sadness, the Sitka Jim believed would take the title of tallest spruce.

The tree had been hit by lightning, was partially dead and due to be felled. We were however consoled by a superb 31ft 6in girthed Sequoiadendron.

### Ardkinglas Woodland Garden

Abies grandis at Ardkinglas Woodland Garden



In glorious weather we crossed country into Argyll. Chic pointed out various castles and ruins on the way, his knowledge of Scottish castles is exceptional and his photography and web site are witness to this. Jim's own endless archive of historic Scotland and tree heritage meant the journey was never dull. Loch Fyne was like a mill pool with Ardkinglas Woodland Garden wonderfully reflected in its waters. "There it is!" announced Jim as he scanned the estate for the tall Grand fir. The first tree recorded to ever have reached 200ft and the tallest tree for a number of years. After a set back when its tip died it is now re-growing with two competing leaders. Could it be tallest tree on this particular day? Conditions were ideal for measuring, a far cry from Rothiemurchus the day before. "It's not normally like

this", we were told, but my last visit to Inveraray and the superb gardens of Crarae were also bathed in glorious sunshine.

## Exceptional tree

Now over 20ft in girth the Grand fir is quite remarkable

A relatively easy tree to measure and from two positions we recorded 63m with a clinometer and hypsometer. Again, a not so obvious lean was the reason and four widely separated angles of measurement with the laser suggested an average closer to 61m. The garden recorded 202ft 1in by climbing the tree a few years ago suggesting the true height should be nearer to 62m. It was clear the tallest trees were going to be very close and difficult to separate. The Grand fir was to date my personal favorite. It stands clear of other tall trees, so it looks tall! It also has a superb bole that now measures just over 20ft in girth. It is the only 200ft x 20ft tree we have and therefore truly exceptional, a most remarkable champion! I defy any tree lover not to be moved by this. Somewhat reluctantly we left and Chic navigated to Dunans and the privately owned Douglas that we knew would challenge our measuring ingenuity.



## Resourceful

Chic looks into the ravine for Jim at Dunans

Three Douglas fir stand close together on the edge of a steep ravine. Rhododendron covers much of the ground and the base of the tree can not be seen beyond 5m away. The best shot is from the opposite side of the overgrown gorge. Chic and I stood at a vantage point whilst Jim made his way to place a day-glo square on the trunk at a set height above ground level. After half an hour of shouting to each other across the gorge it was apparent he could not place the marker high enough to be seen. The ever-resourceful Chic disappeared, returning with two lengths of 3m drainage pipe. I bid him farewell as he headed off for the tree. The last I saw of Chic for a while was the sight of two grey plastic pipes moving slowly through the Rhododendrons, some 30m from the tree. Jim returned to base asking where Chic had gone. We shouted until hoarse and Jim decided he would have to rescue Chic. I seemed to have drawn the long straw as I waited in the sunshine for the two intrepid measurers to find each other. I took a few snap shot measurements estimating the height of the tree and considering what I could actually see made it less than 60m, making me wonder if all this effort was going to be worthwhile? A mud stained and exhausted Chic was finally directed to the trees by Jim who helped erect 6m of pipe next to the trunk with a day-glo square stuck on the top. I could now see it, but it was against the wrong tree! "Can you see it?" I could hear being shouted from below. "Wrong tree!" I bellowed until hoarse. I was just about to move off to get closer when finally I heard Jim say "I think he said we are at the wrong tree".



## The tallest so far

The tallest tree in a group of Douglas at Dunans

Another ten minutes saw the pipe placed vertically against the tallest tree and I could just hit the tree with the laser, level with the top of the pipe, now a point we knew to be 6m above ground level. This completely changed my earlier estimates and the first measurement was the tallest so far achieved with the laser at just under 63m. For comparison we had to record and average at least another three more measurements. I joined the others and we achieved a difficult shot from the other side of the tree that helped reduce the average to 62m. At 18ft 2in girth this tree is bigger than any at Moniack. It is covered in moss and lichens and looks like a native Oregon tree. A rhododendron grows from its bark about 3m up. It now has two competing leaders which do not appear to have grown significantly over recent years, but within the range of error for our instruments it was too close to separate from the Moniack tree. With the weather now looking good everywhere for a few days we made the decision to return to Beaulieu and Moniack Glen for a second visit.



## Brake failure

Driving along the banks of Loch Awe was picturesque and peaceful, until the brakes failed on the car. Chic identified a broken brake pipe and we drove carefully back to a small garage at Lochawe. The elderly lady at the garage (a few pumps and a shed) announced she was soon to close. Without any tools Chic knew a pair of 10 inch vice grips would make a temporary repair to get us to the next main garage. The lady announced she had no tools and then from a drawer by the till produced a set of original 10 inch Molegrips. "Except these....which you can't have". The drawer was snapped shut and we were left speechless! Chic tried in vain to persuade her they would be returned the next day and even though by a miracle it appeared he knew someone she did, he could not convince her of our honesty. In the end our pathetic pleadings drove her to let us try them just to see if the makeshift repair worked. It did and triumphantly we drove away with promises of returning the tool, but I am sure she never believed she would ever see them again. (Chic returned the vice grips on his return home with grateful thanks for saving us!)

## Warm welcome

Stand of tall Douglas viewed through beech trees at Moniack

We made it to Fort William by dark where we stayed our last night away. Another glorious day dawned, this time beneath a snow capped Ben Nevis and Jim took us to the wonderfully idyllic estate of Achnacarry. Here we were again warmly welcomed and allowed through electric gates to measure another tall Sequoiadendron. Here the tree had not been measured since 1981 when it was 50m. There is apparent rivalry between this and the Castle Leod tree. We only managed two sightlines in the time available and settled on a draw between the two trees at 51m each. Another magnificent specimen!



## Return to Moniack

One of the viewing points required for recording the tall tree

Our return to Moniack Glen was a complete contrast to two days before. Only a light breeze blew the tips of the tall trees. Making extra efforts to record from obscure positions we again could not make the tree taller than the Dunans tree. The three tallest heights we recorded of each tree when averaged gave it to Moniack by 10cm. As this tree is easily accessible to the public and surrounded by other exceptionally tall Douglas, this tree was declared champion by our main sponsors Tendercare Nurseries. In reality all three trees are very close and either of the others could be the tallest tree when measured again. Our personal choice over the three days was the Dunans tree, this was Chic's favourite. Mine was the grandis at Ardinglas and Jim revelled in the monumental group of tall trees at Moniack where no doubt there will soon be more 60m trees than anywhere else.



## National monuments

All these trees should be treated as national monuments, it was a privilege to see so many fine specimens and my personal thanks go to Jim Paterson for his local knowledge and without whom none of us would know so much about these trees and Chic Henderson for all his help getting us safely round Scotland.

## Thanks

Sheltering from the rain beneath the Castle Leod Sequoiadendron, Jim Paterson (left) and David Alderman discuss the difficulties encountered measuring trees in the Highlands and how long they can survive this expedition on a diet of lentil soup

Special thanks to our sponsors Andrew Halksworth and Tendercare Nurseries, Sir Jackie Stewart OBE and Paul Stewart. Also thanks to Fujikura UK, Neil Parker and Greenwich Observatory Ltd., Mike Cox, Ardinglas Woodland Garden, Forest Enterprise, The National Trust for Scotland, Mr Hyslop, Derrick Holdsworth, Professor Nicholas and the wee lady at Lochawe who rescued us with her vice grips.

