



PEOPLE AREN'T JUST KEEN TO GET COMPETING AGAIN, THEY ARE ALSO HOPING TO RAISE THEIR GAME

Logging back on

Susan Burke reports from the UK Loggers Championship 2021, held at Reaseheath College in Cheshire, at which Richard Elliott narrowly beat Peter Fox for the top spot.

SEVENTEEN loggers, three of whom were newcomers, recently negotiated their way to Cheshire to compete in this year's UK Loggers Championship. Organiser Peter Fox explained: "Reaseheath College, Nantwich is a central location for most of the attendees. The staff have been brilliant in helping with arrangements and are already keen to host the UK Loggers again. There's a great sense of camaraderie amongst the competitors and everyone arriving here has mucked in to help – people aren't just keen to get competing again, they are also hoping to raise their game."

Peter was keen to stress that, without support from the sponsors, the UK team would not be in a position to highlight the forestry industry on the national and international scene. Husqvarna supports all the competitions and assists with international travel and training. Aspen Fuels supplies fuel for the event and more as prizes. Hunter Wilson – part of Clifford

Jones Timber – supplies the poles for the limbing competition.

Both Tilhill and Euroforest regularly support with prizes at one-day events. Competitor Alun Jones, as always, ensured suitable timber was available for the cross-cutting disciplines. Both Richard Elliot and Mark Edwards made contributions to the prize table, as did Welsh 'not-for-profit' forestry support organisation Focus on Forestry First. The support of the Forest Industry Safety Accord is also much appreciated. This is a reciprocal arrangement: nowhere will FISA access a better shop window for its safety campaigns than when the top UK chainsaw operators compete. Any lapses of safety protocol occur in the public eye and incur strict penalties.

John Tunstall, instructor/lecturer for Reaseheath College's Forestry and Arboriculture course, said: "I'm well-pleased that the UK Logging Championship is

being held here this year and would like to see it grow. Our goal is to hold an annual Cheshire Tree Felling Competition and, if the UK Loggers would agree to do a training course with our forestry and arb students, that would be even better. From 21 September of this year we expect to have two or three women starting our forestry and arboriculture course. In the past, women have done well. They generally make good, careful climbers as they think before acting. Slow training over two years doesn't only teach students how to use chainsaws and machines. It underpins the raft of forestry knowledge."

John also thanked tree surgeons Jason and Dave of DB Rudd & Sons, Market Drayton, Shropshire, for supplying the felling timber. "The Scots pine came from the Clovelly and Shavington Estates. We needed awkward sizes cut, so their efforts are much appreciated."

As the competition reached its climax on

Main: Dewi Williams (front) and Gethin Hughes are next up to test their skills to the limit on the artificial trees. Both Dewi's Husqvarna 572XP and Gethin's Dolmar ran well for the two Welshmen in this event, and Gethin was ready to admit that a few inexplicable errors he had made earlier in the competition would see a fall in his personal ranking this year.

Top right: The full UK Loggers team – competitors, judges and administrators – were back in action in Cheshire in August 2021. Judge and organiser Richard Siddons (kneeling on the right) was able to report that getting back together after a year's enforced postponements seemed to have enhanced the bonding and sporting spirit within the UK team.

Bottom right: Under 24 years of age competitors (left to right) Rhys Perkins, Corey Davies and Adrish Cole. While competitor Mark Edwards donated prizes for the winning relay team, Richard Elliott had similarly personally contributed prizes to the table for the younger competitors. Adrish Cole's score of 1311 points put him well up amongst the professionals and under the rules he was invited to the UK Loggers national selection trials.

UK LOGGERS

the final run on the limbing poles, a two-horse race developed between Peter Fox and Richard Elliott. Although Richard had led on the felling, Peter had edged the other disciplines. While Richard incurred no penalty points in the whole event, Peter transgressed once and had the statutory 20 penalty points docked from his total, leaving Richard to clinch the title again; this time by a mere three points.

Reaseheath Hall was constructed north of the Cheshire market town of Nantwich around 1750. After WWI, the building and its estate were acquired by Cheshire County Council and, in 1921, the Cheshire School of Agriculture welcomed its first students. The young men (women were to be admitted later) lodged in the main building of the former stately home.

The Worleston Dairy Institute – an establishment founded a couple of decades earlier in a nearby village to promote and improve production of the county's famed cheeses – was soon incorporated into the new school. Development of dairy and arable farming techniques remained the mainstay of the curriculum in the early years and, although women were admitted and eventually provided with their own on-site hostel, they remained in the minority.

All was to change with the outbreak of another war in 1939. By February 1943, 1,000 recruits to the Women's Land Army had completed their basic training at the school and girls continued to pass through Reaseheath Hall before moving on to toil in the land-based industries upon which the nation depended.

Normal courses resumed after the war but things had changed; female students enrolled in significant numbers as did ex-service personnel. The professional commitment of the teams of students in undertaking farming tasks and attending lectures was not in question; the pre-war attitude of the authorities to extra-curricular discipline would need to adapt to the new post-war values; was it reasonable to forbid lads, who could well have faced enemy fire on the beaches of Normandy, from having a pint of beer in a Nantwich hostelry on a weekday evening?

It would take more than a decade for the Cheshire School of Agriculture to be awarded college status and many students from those days, with a lifetime of work and living behind them, remember their time spent at Reaseheath with affection. Gillian Butters (nee Mainwaring) enrolled on a two-year agriculture/domestic science course in

1958. After an apprenticeship on a working farm, the second year was spent on every practical discipline the school offered.

Gillian felt she benefitted greatly from the cookery classes, which she enjoyed greatly in the company of her friend Glenys. They elected to make sausages for their team of students.

While Glenys fed the meat-and-husk mixture into the machine and guided the finished product into the skins, Gillian had the tough job of forcing the mixture through with a large wooden spoon. With the last link of sausages tied off, Gillian removed the spoon to find the bowl of the spoon had disappeared completely. The girls said nothing whatsoever about the incident and that evening, they donated their sausages to the hungry young students who declared them to be the best they had ever tasted.

The range of courses available at Reaseheath has expanded hugely over the years. The recent installation of the Lely Astronaut A5 robotic milking system on the campus to deal with the production of the college's pedigree herd enhances the learning experience of the agriculture students. The dairy industry, once a keystone sector in Cheshire's rural economy, is facing an uncertain future.

Local youngsters are now just as likely to find employment opportunities in sectors previously seen by some as less traditional. The Forestry and Arboriculture department and the Game and Wildlife Management department at Reaseheath College each now offer four higher and two further education qualifications. Offering a diverse range of studies across a wide span of sectors has ensured the college authorities have built an expansive network of industry partners.

The UK Loggers have now joined the team with the event the first part of a two-stage competition to select the team that will represent the UK at the 2022 World Logging Championship in Serbia.

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Main: Dan Williams looks thoughtful as judge Tony Savage and his assistants scrutinise the detail of the second of his 'precision cuts'. Dan had already admitted he was having a 'nightmare' of a competition and a knee problem would put him out of the running on the second day. The score list, however, showed Dan's 'precision cuts' were highly commendable.

Left: One of the Reaseheath College gazebos protects Richard Elliott from a heavy downpour as he undertakes the simulated felling section. There is talk of the college installing facilities to allow competitors in the future to fell full-sized poles, more fulfilling for the chainsaw operators and far more exciting for the spectators.

Top right: For some reason the 'combined cuts' discipline at the UK Loggers 2021 event conspired to put a few of even the most experienced competitors out of the running for the top ranks by the Saturday evening.

The undercut and the topcut must meet fully within the green zone. In this case the judge will have to decide whether the competitor on this occasion just managed to get the positioning right. There is no question that points will be lost for the 'step' where the cuts meet.

Right: Alun Rees Jones finishes the backcut in the simulated felling section. An estimate of the directional accuracy will be ascertained by means of a laser beam impinging on a screen. Then judge Richard Siddons will remove the 'tree' from the 'stump' and take precise measurements of the levels and dimensions of all cuts.

