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Coppicing returns to ancient woodlands in Cornwall

As Cornwall's woods awash with the scent of wild garlic, local woodsman Tom Kemp revives the ancient art of coppicing

Along with the return of the Cornish language, and goods being delivered under sail, many traditional crafts are seeing a revival in Cornwall at the moment. Before 1900 most woods were coppiced pretty intensively, and whilst those who did it weren't primarily interested in wildlife, they were actually helping nature in a massive way.

Coppicing is an ancient woodland management system that is carried out on rotation, and helps restore equilibrium in woodlands. Trained woodsman Tom said, "A woodland with coppicing in place may see a mosaic of colours and ecosystems harmoniously living together, which is why it's as important today as it was centuries ago."

Around 9% of Cornwall's land is comprised of woods, with just a little attributed the Ancient Semi Natural Woodland or ASNW status. Due to the adverse weather conditions and overexposure to the elements, Cornwall has some of the poorest quality of wood. This means that Tom has to get inventive and creative when it comes to using his material.

As such, Tom has found ways to make the work he is so passionate about, pay for itself. An artisan, he creates bespoke traditional pieces for private dwellings and heritage gardens, selling his wares at craft shows around the county. In the summer time, wood gathered from coppicing is used to make charcoal and fuel the fires of beachside barbecues.

Small foresters and woodland managers such as Tom see the wood for the trees by approaching each project with care. Evaluating the wider value woodland currently has, Tom can devise plans for its potential benefits for the local community.

Creating flood defence faggots within rivers or controlling invasive species is all in a day's work for Tom, who manages volunteers at the Holifield Farm Project, amongst many other services.

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Both small woodland owners through to large wooded estates haven't just wanted short-term help with a troublesome tree or an overstood coppice: he addresses sustainability, implementing a holistic approach to getting the most from Cornwall's wood.

Tom has helped improve and increase the use of woodlands all across Cornwall and Devon, whilst offering courses to teach traditional practices such as coppicing and hedging at Heligan Gardens. Tom's bespoke pieces complement any Cornish garden, as he keeps designs traditional and inventive.

Across the rest of the country, one in ten visitors to forests are already volunteering in helping woodlands. Working alongside him, Tom enjoys connecting communities to their trees, with the use of volunteers. Volunteer work includes improving and creating access routes, and using cleared woodland byproducts to make original, traditional one-off pieces for clients.

To find out more about the services provided by Tom, see his website at <https://sites.google.com/site/tomkempwoodsman/home/2---coppice-crafts>

and his selection of artisan products and work are available for viewing <https://www.flickr.com/photos/100130215@N06/sets/72157635018300315/>

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