



Cambridge District Woodcraft Folk

Annual Report 2008-2009

District Report

It's true - when you resign as chair you do see your past three years flash before you and one image that hurtled through was at last year's Spring Camp when myself and lots of other adults were playing Robin Hood with a selection of demented Elfin and Pioneers. Thankfully I was on the side of Good, but can anything match the sheer joy that children show running around a wood with lots of others? Their euphoria is always infectious.

The next memory was being in the kitchen tent during a downpour (the only remaining form of cover as the camp had been dismantled) with scores of others, giving a powerful and lusty rendition of: 'If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands' and we did. We did.

Why do we do it? I don't know. But people that go on camp know that there is nothing like getting out of your tent and eating your breakfast in the open air with lots of other people. I believe that communality is a basic need - and that's what the Woodcraft Folk does best. Everyone knows this of course - after all, the number of suicides dropped during the second world war despite nightly bombing raids - and as I read through the group reports I see once again the real pleasure that trips away and the weekly meetings can engender, giving unique memories to all of us.

As a District this year we have been as busy as ever. The programme called Follow the Trail has been launched allowing us to analyse how we see our involvement in Woodcraft and whether it lives up to our aims and what we can do to make that connection better. We are starting up a new group of Elfin, we have had musical afternoons

so songs we all enjoy so much around the campfire can be passed on and as I speak an enthusiastic fund raising programme will soon begin to enable our young people to go to Peru and meet those that came to Global Village in 2006.

We had a really good response to our Tent Repair Day and managed to repair 44 tents and this was another occasion where joining together to do these jobs made a chore much more enjoyable. We also

helped, as usual, at the Beechwoods Nature Reserve laying woodchip, cutting back ivy and replanting saplings (helping enables us the use of the reserve when we take the older children bivvying) and we also served tea and cakes on the Oxfam Walk. The Elfin Regional Day was a great success as always and the Darsham Country Centre is as popular as ever.

Cambridge District continues to regenerate and grow and will, I believe, always do so, despite the pressures of our lives. This shows in the way our older Woodcrafters want to remain involved by their attendance at the Annual gathering and also their

involvement in ongoing campaigns so we can see that, for some, the Woodcraft Folk isn't just somewhere to go every week, it becomes a way of life that stays with people for the rest of their lives. The reason is simple - Woodcraft offers something unique to our young people.

So I'll say goodbye and thanks for the tea and biscuits.

Trish Rawson

Chair/Co-ordinator Cambridge District



*Cambridge Woodcraft Folk affiliate to:
CCVS and Young Lives (formerly CCVYS)*

Cambridge Woodcraft Folk acknowledge the continuing financial support of the Co-operative Movement with many thanks

Acorn Elfins

We have had a good year with an exciting programme of group nights, and a good mix of ages and gender. Some Elfins have moved on to Pioneers and so we've been able to welcome some new children into the group. The group is well supported by parents and the children continue to have great fun!

We started off the year with a discussion of rules followed by co-operative games and then moved through a spring programme full of busy activity. We cooked and sang, made compasses and went swimming at Parkside Pools. We sang to the residents of Ditchburn Place and celebrated Chinese New Year by floating lanterns on the river. We finished off with a barbeque at the Beechwoods, playing games in the woods, and were back late!

There was a great start to the summer with the first week spent making kites and windmills followed by a lovely evening on Magog Down flying them. The children used the hill to good effect by running down at top speed such that even the most sluggish kite was bound to perform to good effect. We went out on many more evenings to take good advantage of the summer evenings, with trips to Coldhams Common, Wandlebury, Milton Country Park, Harlton Woods, and finally, to Lammas Land to all get wet in the paddling pool and have a picnic barbeque. Other evenings were spent studying maps and map reading, having a go at country dancing, straw and circle art, and generally playing games and singing.

In the autumn we started off with a gentle first evening of talking about what we'd all been doing over the summer, followed by parachute games, and then singing. We then started on an autumnal theme with a trip to Lode, and the gathering of fruit, mainly blackberries, sloes and apples as we walked along the water and around the fields. Then the next week we made fruit parcels, wrapped in pastry, and with the keen addition of that very important elfin ingredient, lots of sugar! Onward into conker collecting on Midsummer Common, followed with some beautiful conker art. Before the weather closed in we also had trips to Wandlebury for a night walk and orienteering, and went to the Beechwoods for a nightline and fire. Back in the hall, we made our own shampoo with all natural ingredients, followed by hair washing at home for some of us! Then as we moved into the winter season proper with much time spent on practicing shows and rehearsals, song and dance, and finishing on seasonal crafts.

Aside from the group nights there were the usual events such as the annual get together at Regional Elfin Day in March and the Oxfam walk in May, and we also had a social evening for parents in November that we plan to do again. Then there were a variety of camps including the District Spring Camp at Thorpe Woodlands at the end of May, the Elfin camp at Great Gransden in June, and then in summer we camped for a week in the Brecon Beacons. This was a fantastically wet and muddy experience, with lots of singing and sitting around fires. Perhaps one memory that will stick with many of us is the day we went caving. After what seemed like ages in the car park getting into our caving suits, helmets and lights, then having to prove our bravery by squeezing under a low stile through a deep muddy puddle so that we were covered from head to foot, and then walking hand in hand across a fast flowing river, trying to balance on slippery boulders, with freezing water filling our Wellington boots, and then we got into the caves! This involved such pleasures at the 'Letterbox' where each individual had to be 'posted' through such a thin horizontal slit that we had to position our heads sideways, and then rely on

fellow Elfins be pushed through from one end and pulled from the other. Elfins rock!

Martin Smart



Badger Elfins

We have welcomed a number of new members to our group this year who have brought with them a host of fresh ideas. We saw in the summer by making a Maypole which we then weaved patterns down to the beat of a drum. As always, most of the summer term was spent outside with a variety of activities including walking, conservation work, pond dipping, bug hunting, wide games, camp preparation and water sports at Cherry Hinton Hall. Elfin camp was well attended by Badger Elfins. We enjoyed dam and den building, making bees from alder cones and carded wool and meeting new and old friends from the Acorn Elfins, Diss, Norwich and Thurlow groups.

We made the best of the early Autumn warmth by going blackberry picking at Wandlebury. Sadly other people had got there first, but all was not lost once the Elfins stumbled on the apple orchard. Some Elfin generated windfalls ensured that everyone went home with enough apples for at least three crumbles and so full of apple themselves that for the first time ever we all forgot to open the obligatory packet of biscuits! As the nights drew in there was less opportunity to go outside. We focussed on our 'World Friend' badge and making Christmas crafts to fundraise for Jimmy's Night Shelter. Particular highlights of the Autumn term were the drumming workshop; bonfire, toasting of marshmallows and singing with Huw at Fulbourn Nature Reserve; and the conker craft night. Some of the children weaved fantastic conker spiderwebs, while the more traditionally minded opted to thread a single string through their conker organise an outdoor conker fight tournament.

This term the Elfins have planned their own programme. Activities include: an Elfin Olympics; torch tag at Cherry Hinton Hall; egg decorating and egg rolling. The running of the group has become increasingly co-operative this year with more and more new adults getting involved and with the Elfins themselves taking on more organisational tasks. There is a great cohesion and enthusiasm in our group at the moment. Let's hope it continues!

Deb Hempstead, Lorraine Irving, Julie Ross and Daryl Stewart

Cambridge Pioneers

There were several events in 2008 which drew together the two Pioneer groups. The Rheumatic Penguins and the White Eagles meet on different nights of the week so it is special events that bring us together – such as the ice skating on Parkers Piece which brought the year to an end.

Regional Pioneer camp in July was at Thorpe Woodlands (near Thetford) once again and this year we were joined by others from Diss and Norwich: a total of 33 Pioneers plus 8 adults enjoyed a great time with the usual mixing up of everyone into 6 Pioneer clans (plus a clan of adults) which each planned food for the weekend before going to the supermarket to shop. A wide range of meals resulted as well as treats for cooking in the embers of the camp fire – eg baked bananas laced with chocolate buttons! A much wider range of the site's challenge activities were attempted (compared with previous years), mostly successfully and Sunday morning saw us float across the river to play the legendary "Generals" wide game in the pine forest. A great weekend.

At October half term we took two full minibuses of Pioneers up to Lockerbrook in the Peak District – a first visit for many of the Pioneers to this fantastic Woodcraft centre high up above Ladybower reservoir. This was also a first visit for several of the adults but it is highly unlikely to be the last as we explored the beautiful countryside in a biting wind. The water was tipping over the edge of the dam and pouring in waves down the front while wind blew spray into clouds above the upper reservoir. This was the weekend that saw the Lake District's overnight hike abandoned with many having to be rescued.

Rheumatic Penguin Pioneers

The group has changed quite a lot in the past year. We have said goodbye to Esmee who returned to Canada, and James who moved up to the Venturer group. Several members seem to have faded away, new ones have arrived and some have come from the thriving Elfin group. As last year we remain a small group, with only ten regulars at present, although probable new arrivals from the Elfin over the next few months should easily outweigh the one Pioneer certain to go to Venturers. This should mean that the group will expand in the course of 2009.

The year's events comprised the usual heady mix of indoor and outdoor activities. Walks and games were enjoyed at the Beechwoods, Lode, Harlton Woods [good rope swings!] and Wandlebury [proving too dark for the planned Environmental Art session - cock up on the daylight front by your reporter]. Another cycle ride along the Cam towpath coincided with a "bumps" event which added to the congestion of a summer's evening.

Constructions included kites, junk giants and a rather chaotic marble run involving step ladders. Instructions covered star gazing, cooking [Spanish omelette very popular] and how to play racing demon - a form of patience for several players which allows insults to be hurled across the table under the guise of a card game. Other evenings involved leathercraft, street art rubbing, a tour of the Barnwell Road Local Nature Reserve plus impromptu kabadi, swimming at Parkside and a skating session at Parker's Piece with the White Eagle Pioneers.

Chris Thompson

In the Peaks the rain largely held off while we were out walking and we avoided the very tops of the hills, but even so we had to make use of the bothie shelter from the leader's pack to keep out of the cold wind while having lunch. On the Sunday the steep hillside down from Lockerbrook proved as attractive as ever to us flatlanders from the fens – well the Pioneers anyway. And we used blindfolds and the lengthy permanent night line in the woods to gain a different experience of working together to negotiate the unknown. A weekend full of new experiences, activity and fun.

Richard Robertson



White Eagle & Jungle Pioneers

This year has been busy and successful with adults and Pioneers growing in confidence. We currently have 22 Pioneers on our books and a healthy waiting list. Over the last year six or so long standing group members have left, mostly to join Venturers. While Elfin tend to send us new Pioneers before their tenth birthday, we have had a flexible approach to moving on, so the group at the moment spans the age range of 9-13 years.

Highlights from the last year include a trip to Cudham, the very popular Pioneer camp, when every single group member went, orienteering, where kids got lost, raising £450 for Smiletrain through a garden fete, going ice skating, and going to Lockerbrook. They also played lots of Kick the Can. There was also the sleepover in the Beechwoods. We have combined international education such as learning about the work of Smiletrain in the developing world, and the Saharawi refugees' situation in Algeria, with music making, and wild activities in the outdoors. We also made crafts for the Mill Road Winter Fair.

We now have a good number of parents running the group and all parents help at least once a term. But we still need more Woodcraft members to ensure we comply with the rules, especially when outdoors. We continue to benefit from expertise from other members of the district. An especial thank you to Huw for singing with us.

Alice Reid, Claire Cameron, Simon Cox and the White Eagle and Jungle Pioneer leaders

Venturers

The Venturers returned this autumn full of tales from V-camp which couldn't possibly be published in a family publication such as this. The most important things to note are that a good time was had by all and that much was learnt both through the programme and through extra-curricular experiences.

We kicked off the Autumn by welcoming a number of new members. The Venturers made a huge fabric collage of their ground rules. These were distilled down to four essential lines: 1) Speak in turn; 2) Listen to others when they speak; 3) No unnecessary violence; 4) Respect! These have been adhered to very well and helped the group run smoothly and with minimum levels of violence. The Autumn Venturer programme was somewhat eclectic and included cooking, swimming, a night walk, learning about Amnesty, a drumming workshop and eventually preparing the Christmas show for the Elfin. This year the Venturers used overhead projectors to put together Peter Pan. We all had a great time experimenting with shadows and the surprisingly boundless creative opportunities afforded by two overhead projectors.

This term the group has grown still further. The Venturers had their first meeting hijacked by the Follow The Trail initiative that the District has undertaken. However, their observations and contributions were insightful and practical and as a result all Cambridge District groups are now undertaking to create a relevantly 'youth' or 'child' friendly piece of media to go with their group.

This term's programme includes a chocolate evening (with food and a conscience), t-shirt printing, a night walk and planning and organising a trip to Darsham.

Sonia Trickey and Ingrid Wesley

Eastern Region Report

Cambridge District is part of the Eastern Region of the Woodcraft Folk, which stretches from Aylesbury to Lowestoft and includes some large districts, but also small, isolated groups in rural areas. Being part of the region gives us, in addition to friendship and support, access to funding, the opportunity to share ideas and events and to plan training and development.

In the past year the Eastern Region has run a Family Elfin Day, held in Cambridge, a Pioneer Camp, a picnic and a Learn2Play course. We also ran children's activities at the Latitude Festival near Southwold. The regional newsletter is sent out with Woodcraft World and will in future be available on-line.

The Regional Gathering and AGM, held over a weekend in November, was the usual mix of training and social activities. Currently the Treasurer, Richard Robertson, Secretary, Hilary Sutton, DF Rep, Lucy Prince-Mobbs and Training Co-ordinator, Gill Miller represent Cambridge District on the ER Committee.

We are now planning a regional Summer Camp to be held in August 2009.

Hilary Sutton, Secretary Eastern Region.

DF Group Report

Cambridge DFs haven't done a lot this year, hardly meeting over the latter half. However, of course, we're always at national events, and now there's a whole new tranche of young DFs who will hopefully end up energised and active. Here is an account from Annie Rose of her first DF event, Winter Wonderland, which is held for four days every year between Christmas and new year and is sometimes described as the 'social event' of the year.

"Winter Wonderland was my first DF event.

When I first arrived after a very long journey, I was at once brought to meet so many people and truly felt the welcome of Woodcraft. Before going I had thought of it as a bit of a wild party but when there I went to lots of really interesting and topical discussions and actual debates, which for me was different as I wasn't really in the know. Although I did not know much about these things, I was still welcome to join in and learnt lots from them.

In the daytime there were many different workshops running, from stone carving to the crisis in the middle east, to singing woodcraft songs...

All were welcome. This is why, though I went to Winter Wonderland thinking that it was just a party, all was well and that I still learnt so much (as well as partying on), not only about world events and through topical conversations, but also the friendship, amazing responsibility and the feeling of being part of something big, that I felt I had become a part of a wider community..."

National DF things are all to be found at our shiny shiny website - www.spanthatworld.com

Blue Skies

Philip Richards

Summer Camp 2008

There is a saying that adversity brings out the best in people and this year's Cambridge summer camp in the Brecon Beacons certainly put that to the test. The Woodcraft spirit shone through as our week stayed cloudy, and it rained or drizzled most of the time. Ironically the water supply dried up at one point but our good humour did not. We went on walks, paddled and sailed model boats on the nearby river. We sang and played games, enjoyed crafts, made benders, enjoyed good food and each others company.

The area is riddled with pot holes and other subterranean surprises. The Elfin and Pioneers went caving with local instructors in and around an underground river. In separate groups they experienced quite challenging experiences for their age. Similarly the Venturers and DFs went canyoning and in other ways jumping around in local rivers and came back with tales of much daring and fun. The whole camp got to the local swimming pool that day to make sure they warmed up in the pool and hot showers.

So despite the rain and resultant mud in our field we kept up good spirits and produced our traditional show on the last evening with songs, sketches and jokes. The next day the sun came out to dry the tents and as we drove away we were able to see the splendid scenery for the first time that week.

Richard Robertson