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welcome to the spring 2017 edition of WWOOF UK News

Just to reassure you – it’s WWOOFing as usual in the UK – welcome everyone! The result of last year’s EU Referendum (Brexit) will not affect WWOOFing plans in the immediate or near future.

As I complete this issue of our newsletter in early February, the days are steadily increasing in length and there are some brave snowdrops nodding their heads in the garden – they may be being optimistic as I believe there is some cold weather still to come, but they do lift my heart.

There’s much in this issue of WWOOF UK News which also lifts my heart; WWOOFer Hazel Murphy, page 8, tells how WWOOFing provided a sanctuary and inspiration at a tumultuous time of her life.

Our Co-ordinator, Scarlett Penn, heartened by Hazel’s experience, encourages us to find the authentic WWOOF story to tell in this clamouring world, page 4.

We bring you news of our plans to make a WWOOF UK calendar for 2018 and tell you how to get involved, page 5, and give our Scottish hosts some guidance about grant opportunities, page 10.

Mr Fluttergrub turns his attention to peas, page 6, we ask whether Care Farming is our natural companion, page 7 and there’s much, much more.

There was a bit of space for some organic news this time, page 11, and I should be very pleased to know if you find these occasional items helpful.

Please continue to send me your news, comments and experiences, we love to share them.

Elaine Koster,
Editor

stay in touch

Please send contributions for our print editions to editor@wwoof.org.uk or by post (address page 12) by the following dates:

- 30th April for Summer 2017 issue
- 31st July 2017 for Autumn 2017 issue
- 31st October for Winter 2017 issue
- 31st January for Spring 2018 issue

The deadlines for material to be included in the next four electronic updates are:

- 7th April 2017
- 10th July 2017
- 6th October 2017
- 5th January 2018

We particularly welcome your photographs and letters as well as your WWOOFing tales

Follow us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/wwoofuk
on Twitter: @wwoofuk
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Contact: socialmedia@wwoof.org.uk
And don’t forget members can always post adverts, question and comments on our members’ forum www.wwoof.org.uk/forums/forum

what is WWOOF UK?

- WWOOF UK holds a list of organic farms, gardens and smallholding, all offering food and accommodation in exchange for practical help on their land.
- These hosts range from a low-impact woodland settlement to a 600 hectare mixed holding with on-site farm shop, café and education centre.
- WWOOF hosts should follow the IFOAM organic principles but need not be registered with a certifying organisation.
- Hosts do not expect WWOOFers to know a lot about farming and growing when they arrive, but they do expect them to be willing to learn and able to fit in with their lifestyle.
- The list of hosts is available, either online or as a book, by joining WWOOF UK for a membership fee.
- Once you have the list you can contact hosts directly to arrange your stay.
- Your host will explain what kind of work you will be expected to do, what accommodation is on offer and will discuss the length of your stay.
- WWOOFers do not pay to stay with hosts and hosts do not pay WWOOFers for their help.
- The ethos and mission page of our website gives full details of what is expected of hosts and WWOOFers.
- WWOOF UK is a charity registered in England and Wales 1126220 and in Scotland SC045524.

cover: Lambing at Fyfett Farm, Hazel Murphy

The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily represent those held by WWOOF UK
We recently made a change to our website so that all host Visitor Book comments and WWOOFer Feedback from hosts are switched on automatically. This saves you from having to remember to switch them on yourself. You are still sent an email when you receive a new comment and it won’t be published unless you go to your account and make it live, so the comments are under your control.

From Mike Hammer: Hi folks, just letting you know that we have an active Facebook page plus Twitter and Instagram accounts. Please go and take a look (details are at the bottom of page 2) and then 'like us' – as everyone and their dog is asking you to do these days. The difference with our pages is that you can often happen upon something unexpected; a job opportunity, a new way of doing something or blogs from some really inspirational people who have been WWOOFing in a big way! So take a look and browse through some of our previous posts; hopefully you will discover a new way to be informed.

At the moment there are two regional gatherings confirmed for the spring, they are:

18th March 2017, Central Scotland: Edinburgh Botanical Gardens. For more information please contact kgaffney@hotmail.co.uk.

8th April 2017, North East: Sheffield Organic Growers. For more information please contact janeandtonyatthenursery@hotmail.co.uk.

Following on from the article making the most of WWOOFing in the winter edition of our newsletter, the WWOOF team has resolved to be more hands-on when we receive reports of hosts who have not responded to WWOOFer enquiries.

Every WWOOFer is trying to get the best out of WWOOFing, and in the meantime they are probably trying to arrange transport, other WWOOF places or accommodation, and time off from work; so it’s only courteous that each host they contact gets back to them in good time, even if it’s with just a couple of words. Responding to all WWOOFer enquiries is, after all, one of the commitments a host makes when they become a WWOOF UK member. So, for each report from a WWOOFer about non-communication from hosts, we’ll be giving advice to the WWOOFer about their online profile and the way they communicate with hosts; and we’ll also be contacting any host for whom there is no obvious reason why they would not reply.

We have always done the same in response to reports of WWOOFers who do not show up or change their plans without notice, and we’ll continue to do that too – all in an effort to make WWOOFing a mutually respectful and satisfying experience from start to finish.
let me tell you a story...

Fresh from the Oxford Real Farming Conference, Scarlett Penn wrote a first-impressions article, which was in our January electronic newsletter www.wwoof.org.uk/news/ORFC17. These are some follow up thoughts around the theme of storytelling.

A few weeks ago I wrote these words:

The message which stood out for me is the importance of storytelling if we’re to change the narrative around what is considered normal farming practice. I once heard someone describe organic certification as a tool for globalism. If an ethical farmer shared the story of their beliefs and practices, illustrated how their farm is part of the well-being of the community and the landscape, displayed how welfare is at the heart of their mindset, the people are much more likely to trust, understand and buy.

But without the back story, it’s just another lettuce, another egg, another lamb chop, and much easier for a consumer’s focus to be on beating the price down. Small farmers need to educate in order to change minds. It’s only through consumers paying a fair price for ethical produce that we’ll return to a situation where a realistic livelihood can be derived from the land.

Naturally this got me thinking about WWOOF, and the dip we’re seeing in membership. WWOOF is a charity with a strong benevolent focus and 45 years of stories to tell. There are thousands of tales of friendships made and adventures had, yet we know there are many people still sitting behind their desk, or struggling on alone on their farm, because they can’t imagine what WWOOFing is like.

So here’s the question I’m asking myself: how do we find our stories; how and where do we best re-tell them; how do we display our uniqueness to reach those that haven’t heard of us, or want to have a go but haven’t found the courage to have a go?

Soon after this, during our fortnightly staff meeting, someone asked if they could read aloud an email recently received at the office. That email was from a WWOOFer, Hazel Murphy, and as we listened to her chronicle, a picture emerged of how immersion in the world of WWOOFing had helped her though a deeply upsetting life event, and has even given her the confidence to move away from town life and into the countryside.

As we listened, the emotion of this beautiful, authentic sharing stirred us; our spirits lifted by the happy ending, our hearts gladdened because what we do had such a positive and powerful influence in someone’s life. We resolved to read it again at the start of the next full Council meeting, to remind us to put folk as well as farm at the heart of whatever business and admin decisions we might make.

Towards the end of Hazel’s email she says ‘I feel WWOOFing is seen as a fringe thing and a bit alternative, when in fact it is something that many people can benefit from.’ We agree, so sought to send her story further, asking her if we could feature it in this newsletter, to which she agreed (full story on page 8).

But Hazel has hit on something big here; many really could benefit from WWOOFing...but only if they’ve heard of it, understand the concept and have the courage to have a go. So how do we reach out and expand those take-up numbers?
There's no doubt WWOOF UK offers something unique in the world of volunteer exchanges; it's ethical, it's a charity, it supports the organic sector, there's an experienced in-country team to support all members. It's true we could do better in promoting those facts, but our narrative needs to be about more than environmental credentials. We need to bring WWOOFing to life in the mind's eye, through stories, pictures, spoken word, so people who have never had an exchange can envisage what it might be like.

Spoken word, in the era of social media, is often overlooked, but can be the best way of creating a meaningful and trusting connection. Talking to a team member, I'm told about a Scottish smallholder who has heard of WWOOF many a time, but did not sign up to be a host until she met a regional host contact (RHC) at a smallholding event near Lanark.

And that's another important point; it's proven that people have to hear things several times over before they will understand, relate to, or even remember, a new idea or concept. It's unlikely a (sober!) festivalian encountered at a main stream event, upon hearing about WWOOF for the first time, will just sign up.

So not only do we have to breathe life and colour into the narrative of WWOOF, creating a mental image and broadcasting it far and wide, we have to do so repeatedly, and in with multi media, including real people who actually speak and can relay their tale with authenticity.

That seems like quite a task for a few (office-based) people! So if you – host or volunteer, RHC or events rep, director or staff – agree with Hazel and believe WWOOF to be a potent opportunity to expand your mind, body and soul, the invitation is to join us on this journey creating WWOOF UK's autobiography. And consider this; by sharing your own story, you may even create the conditions for someone else to live happily ever after.

Tell us your tale: info@wwoof.org.uk

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**return of the WWOOF UK calendar: photos needed**

Despite the success of the WWOOF UK calendar in 2016, some of you may have noticed we didn't generate one for 2017. The calendar's production in 2016 was very much a labour of love and, as we had many competing priorities towards the end of last year, we decided, with regret, that we couldn't fit one in.

**However**, the calendar will be back for 2018! We have decided to draw on our experience in 2015 and ensure we have copies available for sale by our Members Weekend in September and online thereafter.

We want the calendar to reflect what WWOOF is about and contain images of WWOOFY things. If you have photos of WWOOFers completing tasks (especially if you can see their happy, smiling faces!), particularly if they were taken in autumn or winter, so that we can remind people that growing and WWOOFing is a 365 day a year activity, please send them to info@wwoof.org.uk as soon as you can. Shots of animals being fed in the snow would fit the bill very nicely too...

Before you rush to send your favourite photo, do check that you are sending us the largest image you have; we think 2MB will be the smallest file size we can use to be able to produce good quality prints. It would be helpful to know where the photo was taken and by whom – and do please make sure you have the permission of anyone in the photo for it to be used in this way. We look forward to hearing from you and thank you.
peas: plot beats packet

Have you ever tasted peas fresh picked from the pod? Or do your peas come processed from the supermarket freezer? Surprisingly, many gardeners seem to shun growing peas believing them to be a troublesome crop. No grower should forgo peas; eating the first pickings fresh from the pod is one of the highlights of early summer, possibly even better than savouring the first strawberries.

It is true that growing a good quantity of peas requires effort. I like to have them fresh for as long a period as possible so I sow at intervals through the spring. This usually provides a succession for picking from mid-June to mid-August.

The first batch is usually sown early April in ground dried and warmed under a clear sheet of polythene. I grow in long rows up to five metres in length. Seed is placed in a shallow spade-wide excavation along the line of the row about five cm deep and five cm apart in a grid pattern. This method gives a row of three or four peas across. Once the peas are set out I carefully replace the soil tamping down with a flat-headed rake and, unless the weather is warm, replace the polythene sheet.

When the peas start to emerge the polythene must be removed. Leaving it on can cause condensation which, in contact with bright sunlight, can scorch the young shoots. If peas have not appeared within three weeks of sowing, they are almost certainly not going to germinate and it is best to re-sow.

One of the problems with peas is that, as tendril-forming clinging plants, they do need a support system on which to climb. Pea sticks simply made from birch or hazel twigs are the traditional and environmentally friendly method of supporting a crop. Unfortunately, because of the menace of wood pigeons that will devour the young plants, I have to enclose the growing crop in netting. Metre high chicken wire, propped up by strong stakes, is run alongside the row on one side with plastic netting strung from the top to the ground on the other side creating a tent effect. This usually thwarts even the most determined pigeon.

Over the years I’ve grown many varieties of peas but my preferred podding type has to be the old garden favourite *Hurst Greenshaft*. This produces plants about a metre tall with up to eleven peas in each pod. Because it’s not quite as hardy as some varieties I don’t use it for the earliest sowings, instead preferring the shorter growing *Kelvedon Wonder* or *Douce Provence*. The latter is a round-seeded variety in contrast to the other two varieties which are wrinkle-seeded. Round-seeded types are slightly harder than their wrinkled cousins and hence good for early sowings. Their downside is that the flavour is perhaps not so good.

There’s much more I could write about peas including some of the other perils that can afflict cultivation, for example several types of mildew, thrips and pea moth (the cause of maggoty peas but fortunately a rare occurrence for me), but I’ll refrain as I don’t want to discourage. And of course, while I’ve focussed here on peas for podding, there are mangetout and sugar snaps where the entire pod is eaten before the peas inside have swelled. I do grow a few of these which, in some ways, are even more worthwhile as they are expensive to buy and need to be eaten very fresh. It’s also worth remembering that peas are one of the best vegetable crops to freeze. If you are untroubled by the carbon consequences of freezing, pea gluts can be processed so that, even in the depths of winter, you can have the convenience of frozen peas from the plot rather than the supermarket.

photo: www.seedparade.co.uk

Mr Fluttergrub is the pen name of someone who is close to the heart of WWOOF UK. Based in the north of England he’s a very experienced grower and has agreed to write a regular column for us. Let us know if his suggestions work for you or if you have other ideas for your region, please get in touch using: info@wwoof.org.uk.
Care Farming

Care farming is the therapeutic use of farming practices

Care farms provide health, social or educational care services for individuals from one or a range of vulnerable groups.

Colin Tudge at Chisholme House

Colin Tudge will be hosting a one-week ‘pop-up’ college beginning on 17th September with our host Chisholme House in Scotland. During the week he will be exploring the real meaning of the term ‘Enlightened Agriculture’ and how it can be brought about.

Colin is a biologist by education and a writer by trade. In the early 2000s he coined the expression ‘Enlightened Agriculture’. He founded the Oxford Real Farming Conference and the College for Real Farming and Food Culture.
Hazel Murphy is a WWOOFer who discovered WWOOFing at a tumultuous time in her life. We are so glad to be able to share her story.

I heard about WWOOF through people on my Permaculture Design Course. One person had just spent a whole year with her young family WWOOFing around Spain and Portugal, and talked of the amazing experiences they had. I'd developed a strong interest in the environment, managing my own allotment, being involved in a local community gardening project and attending a full Permaculture Design Course. However, my perception was that it was for youngsters, and that it was linked to alternative living. When my relationship ended rather suddenly, leaving me shocked and without a proper home, it seemed the perfect thing to do. I wanted a complete change of scenery, not to be on my own and I knew being busy doing physical work would be good for me. As it was the middle of the winter, vegetable growing was not an option, and many of the placements openly stated that winter work was likely to be heavy outdoor tasks like fixing fences, so I looked for options that included some indoor work.

I managed to book my first WWOOF placement within one and a half hours and was very soon on a train to Stroud, to learn all about apple juicing on Our Small Farm, in Gloucestershire. I had no idea what I was in for, and was somewhat nervous when I met Tania, my host, but soon arrived at the farm house to be greeted by Todd the dog and a log fire. I spent three weeks there with the amazing Greenfield family. Regular readers of WWOOF newsletters will remember the front page picture of a daffodil bank. I remember some cold December days weeding and planting the bulbs in heavy clay soil! Ian promised to send us pictures of the flowers in full bloom, but I did not expect to see the result on the front of a WWOOF newsletter. It made all the hard work seem worthwhile.

At Our Small Farm, I learnt all about apple juicing, from picking apples, washing them, juicing and bottling. The farm was just a mile from a small village and on the edge of the Cotswolds. The highlight for me, though, was moving sheep on my last Saturday on the farm. I had never worked with sheep before and I loved this. I was mesmerised by the experience of watching the sheep charge down the road and standing waving and making sure they went the right way. Although I grew up in London, I always...
dreamed of living on a farm but never thought I would, or that I would be any good at farming. I felt quite emotional when I realised this dream just a month after a traumatic break up.

My second placement was on Fyfett Farm, a sheep farm in the Blackdown Hills which has been in the Sparks family for four generations. Here the request was for somebody to help with sheep work and general farm tasks, but also some housekeeping. I booked for an initial two weeks, but ended up staying five months! I did have another placement booked but cancelled this as I was enjoying the sheep work so much and I didn't want to miss out on seeing the farming year through. First it was feeding the hogs from last year, and seeing them off to market; then it was care of the pregnant ewes and lambing, spring and light evenings to explore the countryside. I learnt so much here, not just about sheep farming and tourism, but about a living in a close knit rural community. It seemed that everybody knew each other, and many were loosely related. Although we were quite cut off as it was several miles to the nearest shop or bus stop, I never got lonely as we always had people dropping in, often staying to lunch which was our mail meal of the day. It was a proper farm with no central heating, just a Rayburn in the kitchen and a log fire in the lounge. I was treated as part of the family and included in socials etc. including meals with friends in Taunton and visits to other farms. It was a real wrench to leave and I have stayed in touch with the family.

I have now bought a house and settled in rural mid Devon in a lovely town called Bradninch, not so far from the Blackdown Hills where I spent five happy months. I have just taken a new allotment, to replace the one I gave up, and am enjoying entering into the community life here. I don't think I would have been brave enough to move somewhere more rural without the confidence I gained from WWOOFing. Having been born in London and never enjoyed city life, I have now realised my dream of living somewhere rural, and now feel at home in a small community of around 2000 people with views of hills and farmland.

For me WWOOFing is a wonderful way of learning about different ways of life. In both my placements I was included in family social events and really felt a part of the community. I feel WWOOFing is seen as a fringe thing, and a bit alternative, but in reality, it is something that many people can benefit from, if only they knew about it. When I tell friends about it, most of them have never heard of it and many would love to try something like this. The beauty is also that all that is required of you is to be willing, not to be expert. It is a rich exchange of skills and culture, in which both sides benefit. The farmer/host gets to share their love of the land and skills and communicate the true value of the countryside, to many of us who have grown up in towns and cities remote from food production. The WWOOFer brings their own skills and interests, to often fairly isolated areas. Whilst some WWOOF placements are with those leading perceived alternative lifestyles, in very basic accommodation, many are not, and I believe there is something for everybody. Whether you have just weekends to spare, or like me chose to take time out and use WWOOFing whilst working out your next steps, I would say just give it a go. Not only will you learn new skills and build your confidence, but you are likely to meet many new people, from all over the world.

photos: Hazel took all the photos
Scottish grant opportunities

WWOOF UK director, Nim Kibbler is based in Scotland and recently sent us this very useful update about funding for crofters and smallholders.

On a windy Saturday during September last year I helped to staff a WWOOF UK info stall at the Scottish Smallholders Festival in Lanark, which is a nice wee agricultural show serving the central belt well. I popped along to a talk by SRUC (formerly Scottish Agricultural College/consulting etc.) and listened to their thirty minute talk about funding opportunities for crofters and smallholders and am now happy to share the details with WWOOF hosts in case it proves useful.

The Scottish government has made grants available for anyone managing land of three to thirty hectares – here’s a brief summary of what’s available with info for further browsing.

Smallholders

The grant will pay for capital work, not running costs. It will rarely be permitted for the purchase of livestock or processing of goods. Common purchases are buildings, hardstands and handling pens but they do have to be shiny and new!

Qualifying for it may involve joining the EU farming subsidy scheme (which could be a whole other article of explanation and ethics). Pillar 1 of this is what is considered the normal subsidy part but Pillar 2 includes development funding with the aim to enhance the rural economy, etc. The small farmers grants are managed by the Rural Payments and Inspection Department (RPID).

Grants could provide up to £25,000 for an individual and £125,000 for a formal group, the percentage of the work that the grant will fund depends on the land you manage and your age. Currently, younger land managers (less than 41 years old) can be supported by 80-90% grant funding. It is also based on the income derived from the land via primary cultivation/rearing.

Additionally, there is the New Entrants grant which is made up of three grant streams; young farmers, those who’ve begun in the last twelve months and capital grants for new businesses (which is really just the small farmer grant again). There are again restrictions, the main being a minimum requirement of three hectares and a maximum income derived from primary cultivation/rearing.
of £500-840 depending on size of land managed. This grant does require you to have a business plan but unlike the capital grant it can be spent on things such as livestock, machinery etc.

You do not need to own your land but you do need to be able to show that you have a considerable tenancy period, normally of over three years.

Crofters

You’ll likely be familiar with CCAGS⁷. Whether you’re a croft tenant or subtenant there’s funding available⁸ and unlike smallholders there’s been funding about for some time. Funding is also available for common grazing committees as long as you’re ‘formally’ recognised as such. Grants of £25k are available for both groups and individuals but require match funding, so it’s not as simple as a straightforward grant. There is also funding of £500 to help establish grazing groups plus the crofting house⁹ scheme.

Crofters are well supported by Scottish Crofting Federation¹⁰ who will be able to assist members with understanding grant availability and appropriateness.

For small farmers and smallholders there is the newly launched one-stop-shop for advice Scotland’s Farm advisory service¹¹ and they’ve a special page¹² for small land managers. SRUC present this information in the hope they’ll get consultancy work but it is entirely possible to manage grant applications yourself. It’s always worthwhile exploring as a grant could cover part of the cost of work you’re intending to complete.

Nim’s article originally appeared in our October 2016 eupdate but we thought it would be helpful to have it in print as well.

Links

1. https://ssgf.uk/
2. https://goo.gl/ykR1E8
6. https://goo.gl/lhXA7d
7. https://goo.gl/O0clD5
8. https://goo.gl/1JaYtb
11. https://www.fas.scot/

photos: Matthew Moodie
Classifieds ads are free up to 50 words at the editor’s discretion. WWOOF UK accepts no responsibility for the accuracy of advertisements and does not endorse the products and services offered. You are advised to check before availing yourself of what is offered. editor@wwoof.org.uk


Where have all the WWOOFers gone? Come and stay on a small Welsh hill farm with the added attraction of lambing time No Wi-fi, no worries, only fresh air and exercise guaranteed!! Call 01239 820432

The Soil Association’s Future Growers programme has been training the next generation of organic growers since 2007. In 2017 it’s changing the way it works and will now provide a six month course of rich, farm-based training events, available for any aspiring grower to participate in. For details see www.soilassociation.org/futuregrowers/

Lodger opportunity! A very large double room (8m x 5m) on the ground floor of a special country home; set in 5 acres of organic smallholding with access to forest. Furnished. Wood burner. Space to grow veg in the walled garden. 5 miles Exeter. £500 pcm all bills inc. Contact: thegreatboatrace@yahoo.com

WWOOF couple or WWOOFers needed to stay for a few months on our Dartmoor smallholding and 60 acre woodland. 3 days a week help required in return for accommodation (all the time) and food on the days you work. Work includes gardening, animals, woodland and building. annie.mollys@gmail.com or phone 01364 631165

We are always interested in hearing from people who would like to be more involved with the WWOOF UK steering group. Please contact scarlett@wwoof.org.uk

Trainee grower opportunity at Black Isle Veg Boxes near Inverness. Some veg growing experience essential but training provided. Must have good work ethic and driving licence. 35hrs / week in exchange for static caravan accommodation, bills, home produce and small renumeration. Couples and individuals welcome. dan@fearniewell.co.uk or www.blackislevég.co.uk

Soil Health; A Living Perspective. A one-day course with Joel Williams on 21st March in Berkshire run by by RegenAg UK. For full details contact Natasha 07866 674205

Free holidays for tired WWOOFers. Large shed with woodburner, cooker and necessary cutlery etc, separate shower, loo, and upstairs bedroom, free for short breaks in our six acre wildlife home in rural North Cornwall. No dogs. Email: alison@zanzig.plus.com

If you want to give an ethical gift that supports a great charity then you’ve come to the right place!

Our gift memberships are available all year round. Buy a year’s WWOOFer membership (online or book, single or joint) to give to any (or all) of your friends and relations.

Just go to the home page of our website (www.wwoof.org.uk) and click on the link.

copy deadlines: 7th April for next e-update, 30th April for summer print issue; send to editor@wwoof.org.uk

WWOOF UK, PO Box 2207, Buckingham, MK18 9BW