

# Hazel Coppicing in Linslade Woods



Hazel has been grown for many 100s of years, but in the early Middle Ages, it was regarded as a very important building material and was used in the construction of huts and barns, wattle fences, and thatching spars. Hazel also was important in helping to drain land as it proved to be a thirsty plant. Further, the small willow branches and twigs were useful in providing the stays when weaving basket and similar utensils.

In order to ensure that the Hazel grew strong and straight it was regularly cut every 7 to 8 years on a rotation basis. Rather than cutting whole swathes, small areas called coupes or cants within the woodland were harvested. This ensured that there was still good tree coverage providing drainage and shelter for both man and beast.



The practice of Hazel coppicing continued right through to the beginning of the first World War and since then the practice has declined. Perhaps this was due to the need for more arable land and perhaps also to the loss of craftsman and the woodland ways. Much of the Hazel has been grubbed out since then and the modern world provides alternative and perhaps cheaper, less labour intensive materials.

Recently, Hazel has been recognised as semi ancient woodland providing ideal eco-areas for flora and fauna and moves have been made to protect much of the remaining Hazel Copses. In some areas the old ways have revitalised and coppicing becoming an important tool in woodland management.



Linslade Woods has some small stands of Hazel and this year in particular we have started to coppice a few trees. The Action Day in October saw a few 'Friends' gathering in one of the small copse. John Creasey, the Greensand Trust's ranger gave a small talk and demo on what we were about to do, coupled with the usual H &

S chat before letting us loose.

The first step was to pick a clump and to cut the trunks (or rods) about 10 - 12 inches above the ground. Having cut the rods we needed to protect the stumps from animals especially the odd visiting deer. From the rods we selected the straightest we could find and cut them into 5 or 6 foot lengths. Choosing 6 or 8 pieces, the ends were taped so that we could 'hammer' them in to the ground in a circle about 4 ft diameter around the stump. Finally we used the off cuts and 'brashings' from the





felled timber to weave around the stakes to up to a height of about 4ft to form a basket called 'a deer basket'. The idea is now to leave what we have done and see how the new hazel growth forms and measure the success of the deer baskets.

Oh! By the way the contraption that Ken is holding the stakes with is called 'a stob twister'.

From the top the photographs are: the Hazel stump; cutting lengths (Judith Knight); tapering the end (Ian Heath); hammering in the stakes (John); making them neater (cutting the tops off - John & Ken Barry); weaving the brashings (Heather Fox); the completed deer basket.

The 'Friends' are a small group of volunteers that help the Greensand Trust 'look after' Linslade Woods and we can always do with more help. A working group for just a few hours at a time assembles once a month either on a Thursday or Saturday and you are always welcome. To find out when you can next help us visit our website: [linsladewood.info](http://linsladewood.info)



**What's next John?**