



### Introducing WRG Forestry Team

At your Chairman's request - see last 'Navvies' - "a piece" by "Sparky", so if your editor prints it... here goes...

Off the ground: both the IWA Training Award Scheme and WRG Forestry Team. As I write from a beach somewhere in the Tropics, may I thank the IWA for my award and to the panel of judges - cheques will be in the post!

Seriously, (You want me to be serious? You'll be asking me to wear a suit next!) the WRG Training Award is an excellent scheme, so get those applications in and let's get more people certified, sorry, qualified.

Over the last 10 years I've completed training courses in basic chainsaw use, pesticide application, fencing, hedge-laying, tree planting, coppicing, charcoal burning, mensuration (always handy at this time of the month!) and more, before moving into the arboricultural courses all in my own time and at my own expense - because I've always believed in professional training to do a job to a professional standard.

All of these skills have been put to good use on canals up and down the country, mainly down as most canals are from where I live way up North.

**WRG Forestry Team** was an idea that came about after being asked to undertake a tree survey for the Cotswold Canals Trust on a 10 mile section of canal from Eastington to Chalford with somewhere in the region of 300-plus trees for complete removal or renovation via pruning, coppicing or pollarding. I had to consult local authorities, BW, etc, regarding planning and conservation issues etc - so we had to have some sort of a 'handle' for initial contacts. "I'm Sparky from WRG" probably translated as "You're who from where?"

After much discussion and much Boddington's WRG FT was agreed on and now we have a nice little logo to go with the title. Feel free to join us at a tree near you, this is definitely clearance work with a difference.

Courtesy of the loan of WRG van 'RFB' for the winter we've been seen at the Bonfire Bash, back to Basingstoke for Xmas, on the Cotswolds a couple of weekends and spent Easter on the Wey & Arun. More news hot off the press next issue.

**Graham "Sparky" Robinson**

And having introduced the WRG Forestry Team, here's some practical advice from them...

### A Simple guide to pruning

After my observations on the Bonfire Bash and Basingstoke Xmas Camp of volunteers pruning trees and shrubs, some good and some bad, I thought it may be helpful to produce a few notes on the correct method of pruning.

Trees are trained and pruned chiefly to keep them vigorous, healthy and - by forming a strong, well-balanced branch framework - stable. Pruning and training are most important in the early years, laying the foundations of a well-shaped mature tree. On established trees, pruning is more often than not confined to the removal of dead, diseased, damaged or wayward growth.

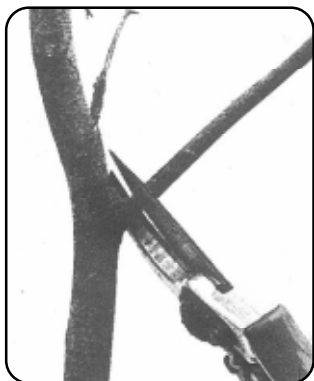
These notes particularly refer to the subject most relevant to us, i.e. the pruning of trees, shrubs and specifically their laterals or side branches; these are the branches that sweep water cans, chimneys and mops off the roof of a boat if the steerer is asleep!

The following information refers to cuts made from the ground. You are advised *not* to climb into the tree however small it is: your safety is at risk as well as the health of the tree concerned. Instead, used a pole saw if available or leave this type of work to the arboriculturists.

All cuts, large or small, should be cleanly made with sharp tools so that plant tissue is not torn or bruised. Use secateurs for soft growth and woody stems up to 1cm (1/2") and loppers for branches up to 3.5cm (1 1/2") depending upon the capacity of the jaws. Bow, pruning and pole saws can be used for branches up to 7.5cm (3"), the more accurate cuts being made with the pruning saws. This is particularly important when making the final-target cut.

Go to a bud or stem as shown (**Fig. 1**), making sure the secateurs are cutting the correct way.

Larger cuts are made as shown (**Fig. 2**), the undercut and top cut being collectively known as a 'step cut'. You may need to make more than one step cut if the branch is long so as to remove it in small manageable sections. [continued on page 32]



**Incorrect use:** when secateurs are held normally (i.e. thin blade uppermost) this lateral (above left) cannot be cut off correctly: the thick blade is nearer the trunk and thus determines the cut's position. The cut is made too far from the main stem (above right) leaving a stub that may die back.

**Correct use:** by turning the secateurs over (i.e. thick blade uppermost) the thin blade is nearer the trunk and the cut can be made precisely where it is required.

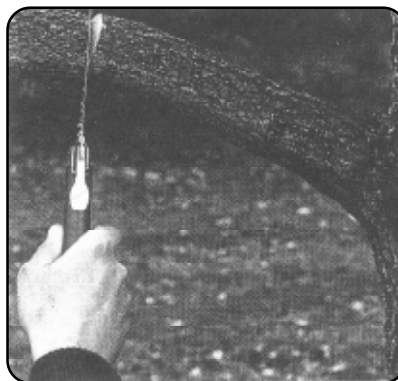
**Fig 1:** the wrong way and the right way to cut off a branch with secateurs.



**1:** Reduce the weight of the branch to make the final cut more controllable.

Some 30cm (12in) away from the trunk, saw a quarter

of the way into the branch from the underside.



**2:** Cut squarely downwards from the top of the branch about 5cm (2 inches) beyond the undercut (further away from the

trunk) until the branch falls away.

This partial cut stops the bark from tearing down the trunk if the branch accidentally breaks.

The undercut ensures that you do not need to support the weight of the branch, provided the area beneath is clear.

**3:** if the remaining stub is still heavy or awkward to support securely, make another undercut 5-8cm (2-3 inches) from the trunk.



Then make the final cut following the line of the branch collar from top to bottom. (see diagrams overleaf for where to make the final cut)

**4: Finished Cut:** The final cut downwards must be completely smooth; if an undercut was first made, ensure that the final cut is either closer to the trunk or meets the undercut exactly.



Smooth any rough edges with a pruning knife without enlarging the wound.

**Fig 2:** cutting off larger branches with a pruning saw.

The final cut is known as natural target pruning and getting this right is essential. You will need to locate the branch collar and bark ridge to implement this cut correctly. (Fig. 3a and 3b)

The general practice in the past was to remove larger branches with a 'flush' cut against the stem then apply wound paint, e.g. Arborex. This is no longer recommended as it has been found that with careful pruning nature can heal a wound quite successfully.

The time at which a tree is pruned is important. It is usually carried out once the sap has stopped running, usually mid/late summer until late winter/early spring.

There are exceptions however (aren't there always!): birch should never be pruned when the sap is or is about to start rising from mid/late winter to mid-summer; cherry is usually pruned in summer to avoid the risk of silver leaf infection. More advice can be given if requested.

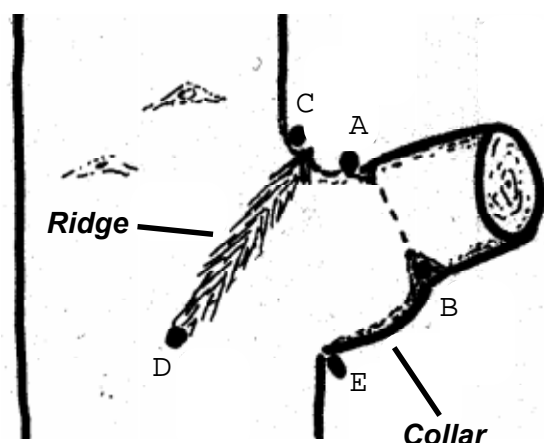
Dead or dying wood can be pruned at any time.

Finally, remember to check your tetanus jabs: it is easy to cut yourself on a sharp pruning saw even when wearing gloves.

**Graham 'Sparky' Robertson**

#### ***Finding the branch collar:***

*If the position of the collar (and therefore the correct position for the pruning cut A to B below) is uncertain, draw an imaginary line from A to E and make angle EAD equal angle EAB.*



#### **Natural Target Pruning**

**Correct pruning should be made as close as possible to the branch collar without tearing the bark and to make the final cut without leaving a stub (but always stub-cut first before removal).**

**Do not injure or remove the collar.**

**Do not cut behind the ridge.**

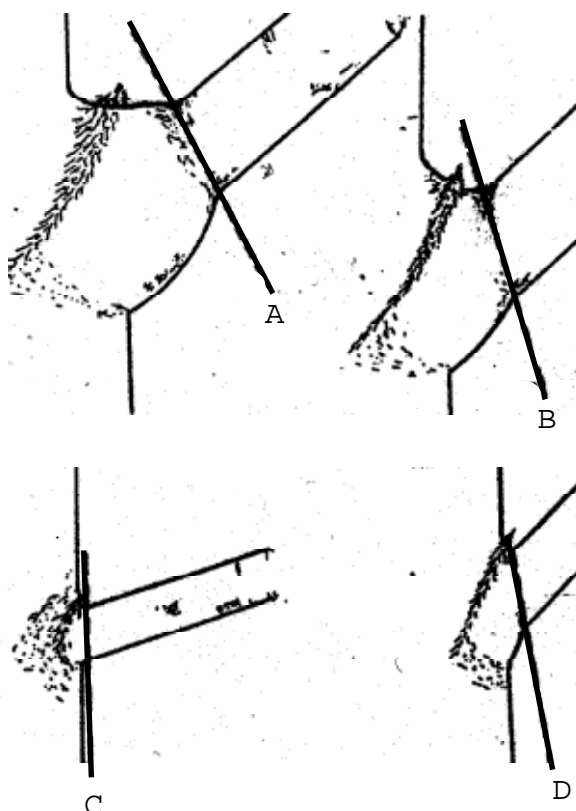
**No set angle determines the position of the pruning cut: see diagrams below.**

**Aim for a complete circle 'doughnut' of callus next growing season.**

#### ***Branch collars and angles of cuts:***

*Proper pruning of a living branch is a cut as close as possible to the branch collar.*

*There is no set angle for a proper cut - it depends on the tree. Cuts A, B, C and D below are all proper cuts.*



**Figs 3a and 3b:** Branch collars and angles of cut