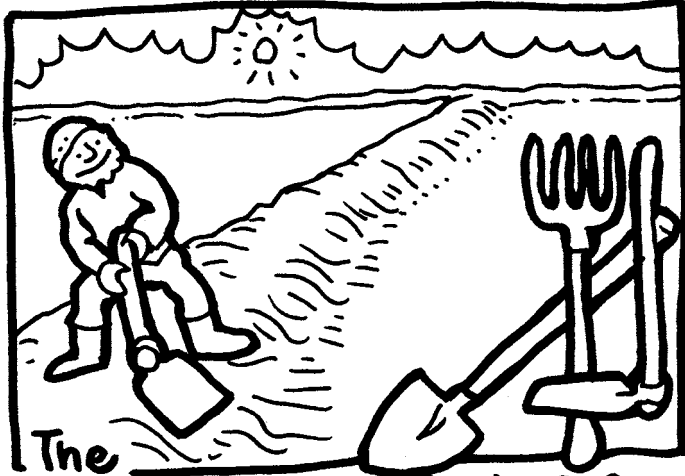


December



The Subsistence Gardener

Banks & Trees

Before we became dependent on fossil fuels, human life in most parts of the world revolved around trees. We were particularly good at being able to manage trees over their whole lifespan, passing on from one generation to the next the knowledge of how to care for each tree, what it was destined to be used for, and how it could be propagated.

From today's perspective, tree planting, and tree care, was relatively straightforward, you simply had to follow the example set by your elders. Things are not so simple today: the past few hundred years have seen a succession of technological evolutions, each of which has had a significant impact on the tree population. Railway and road building has involved a lot of tree felling, as has urbanisation in general, and when there has been large-scale tree planting, it has often been ill considered and of little long-term benefit. Coppicing almost stopped when people started using fossil fuels for heating and cooking, and modern agricultural techniques meant that farmers no longer saw trees playing a useful role on their farms. It is still possible to plant a tree, and look after it during one's life, but how is one to ensure that it will continue to be protected after one is gone?

The best hope is that we are now at the beginning of a new agricultural revolution. Industrial farming has clearly failed, both in its duty to protect the environment, and also to produce healthy food, and its reliance upon fossil fuels to drive its machines, and produce its fertilisers, looks increasingly untenable. For agriculture to become sustainable again, there will have to be more trees: the right trees, in the right place.

Before we became dependent on fossil fuels, human life in most parts of the world revolved around trees.

Small fields, surrounded by banks of trees were the building blocks of pre-industrial farming. The banks were stocked with a mixture of trees, which, in addition to meeting people's need for wood, also played a crucial role in the crop production, acting as a windbreak, preventing soil erosion, helping with water retention, bringing up nutrients from the subsoil, helping to maintain a balance in the insect and microbial life in the soil, and shelter for birds and wildlife above ground.

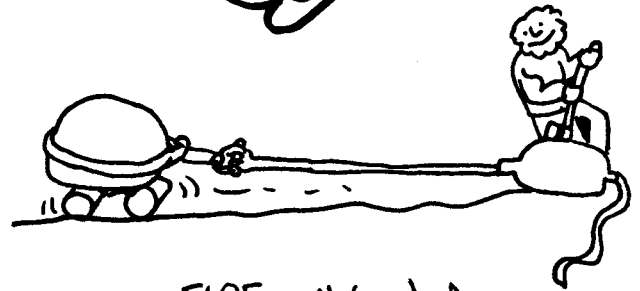
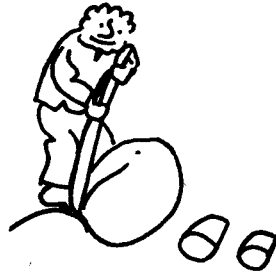
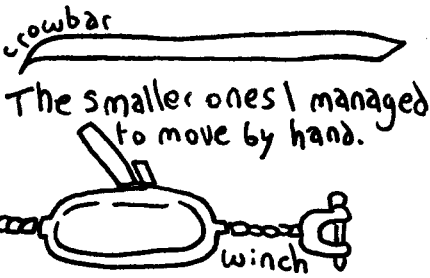
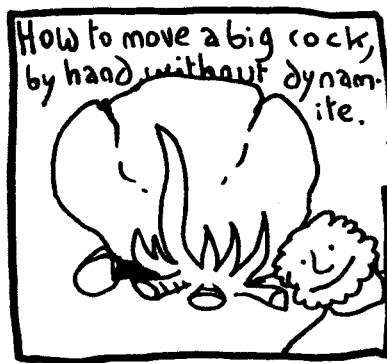
If one could work out where the banks should be, and managed to stock them with the right mix of trees, then people in the future would be grateful to you, and would certainly continue your work in caring for them. The past is probably the best guide in this work. Most of western Europe has been farmed for thousands of years, and it has to be assumed that long-standing hedges had proven to be well-sited, were oriented to give the trees the best light, and worked best for water retention. Traces of these old banks can still often be found on the ground, making restoration easier. They may also be marked on old maps, or may be visible from ariel surveys, which are available to view on the internet – and then there is also one's own common sense, which can also be an excellent guide.

Small fields, surrounded by banks of trees were the building blocks of pre-industrial farming.

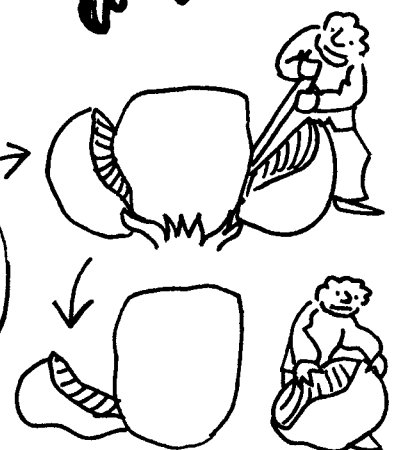
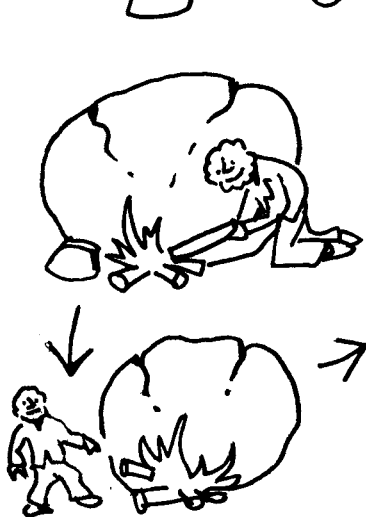
Initially, you do not have to make the bank very big – better to work with a hoe and a fork than to bring in a digger, if you can. Initially, it can even be an advantage to have a small bank, as it allows you to dig down to ground level when planting your trees, making it easier for them to get the water they need in the first few years. You can add to the bank in later years (as can other people if they find that you have put the bank in the right place). It does the trees no harm to have extra soil piled up around them.

As far as possible, it is a good idea to transplant self-grown seedlings, from nearby, onto the banks. A few hundred years is quite a short time for a tree population, and all the seedlings of oaks, hazels, willow, yew, holly, hawthorn, etc. will be derived from the same genetic stock of trees that have been growing in the area since olden times. This increases the chance that you will be planting trees that will thrive in local conditions, and will play a useful role in people's lives for centuries to come.

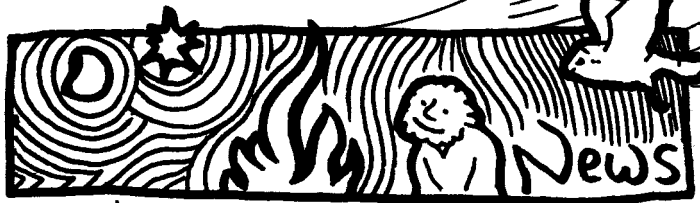
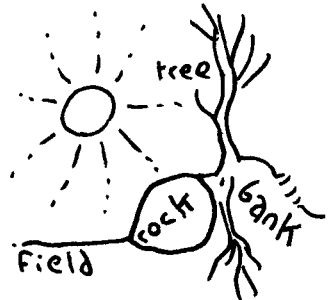
Gareth Lewis



Then came an IDEA



The broken pieces can go on the banks around the field.



moon close to Jupiter on 21st & 22nd december

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