

Terms Of Reference rewrite

8 February 2009

Dr. Carol Wellwood

Subsequent to the submission of the Scoping Study Report by Liz Turner to the Trustees of Plants For A Future (PFAF), and her decision to curtail her involvement in the project, this document aims to develop her proposals and set out in further detail how this researcher would conduct the proposed research. It should therefore be read as a supplement to the report, with some minor amendments, informed by feedback from the Trustees and a close re-reading of the 'Terms of Reference' draft of March 2008.

RATIONALE

The central aim of the research is "to investigate and assess the value of PFAF's lengthy experiment", with the primary focus being The Field at Penpol, which is, to quote Liz Turner, "a living representation of [Ken Fern's] work... with the potential to exemplify the success of the early theory". The Scoping Study Report contains a detailed summary of the time required to complete the survey (Scoping Study Report, Table 4), an amended version of which is included below.

COLLECTING DATA

1. Plant Survey

Three main sources of relevant information are identified in the Terms of Reference draft, the first of which is an ecological survey of the site, similar to that carried out at Blagdon, PFAF's North Devon site, shortly before it was sold. However, that survey described the site in terms of its natural habitats, species and biodiversity, commenting that the impact of the initial planting on the site "has been minimal in all but the broadleaved shelterbelts". This is not the case at Penpol, where a far greater number of species was planted, many of which have survived, and much more work developing the site as plant research and demonstration gardens was done.

The work of the scoping study would be far better described as a plant survey, concentrating as it did on the introduced plants and how well they have fared. This researcher would retain that focus and continue the plant survey, following the surveying method recommendations given in the Scoping Study Report. This is expected to yield unique and up-to-date data on The Field experiment but does not preclude a brief ecological survey and report notes, which would make part of the final report and provide an assessment of The Field project's ecological and carbon sequestration benefits. This work would have to be outsourced, probably to several individuals with different and complementary competences in botanical, bird and insect surveys. *The personnel required and their qualifications will be identified and included in the final draft of this document, as will an estimate of the costs involved, which should not exceed £1500 (I am in contact with a working member of Cornwall Wildlife Trust, who is compiling a list of suitably qualified consultants, from which I expect to find the necessary personnel, willing to work for the same rate as we do).*

The process of surveying with Addy Fern (and, later on, other participants) would continue to include the gathering of historical information on how robust specimens have proved to be, their need of care (including composting, mulching, weeding and tending), their problems, or the lack of them, with the local climate and soil, and their productivity. Attaching identifying tags to the specimens for

future research or monitoring would also continue to be done concurrently with surveying them.

Because of the Ferns' plans to emigrate and the likely permanent loss of their knowledge of the history and viability of many of The Field's plants, it is imperative that the recording of this knowledge be done as soon as possible. However, the time Carol Wellwood can dedicate to field trips is limited to about three or four days a month, so another researcher, Klaudia Van Gool of Groundwork, has been approached and has expressed a strong interest in joining the team. She is aware of PFAF and its aims, has done some volunteering at The Field in the past and met Addy, lives within twenty miles of The Field, and comes highly recommended. It is envisaged that she would spend a day surveying with Carol Wellwood and Addy, and thereafter work with Addy on her own, thus doubling the speed at which data can be gathered.

Liz Turner has agreed to survey The Field's native woodland in appropriate seasons and to provide comments on potential uses of and harvests from the trees there.

2. Historical information.

The second suggested source of information, participants in the PFAF/Penpol project, would be tapped in several ways. The gathering of some of this information has already begun, as part of the Scoping Study. Addy Fern has contributed most of this, as the plants were surveyed. Other PFAF participants who care for parts of The Field will be invited to do the same with the researcher, and should be paid for their time doing so.

Further methods of gathering information can include face-to-face or telephone interviews, and email correspondences. *A draft questionnaire will be created and included with the final draft of this document for suggestions and amendments by the trustees.* Addressing "soft issues", such as labour organisation, division of land, motivation of workers, ethics and principles applied, in interviews, will need to be done with some sensitivity, as there has obviously been some considerable friction between various people involved with The Field. This researcher would welcome advice on how to approach these issues.

Another source of information is Ken Fern's collection of original planting maps, plans and lists, which were scanned into Carol Wellwood's computer and copied to CDs to ensure their continued existence. Although these contain much that is illegible, they represent a partial diagrammatic record of the early situation, and, to some degree, proof of (permaculture) design. Phil James has also provided some maps/plans on CD, and the old Apple Mac file from Land Club member Trevor Miller may yet be translated into a readable form. As such, these deserve careful study and collation, ideally in the form of a series of annotated maps. These are likely to prove useful aide-memoires for interviewees and supply informative illustrations for the final report. An estimate of the time required for producing such maps was not included in the Scoping Study Report but is included in the amended table below. These maps would help in the recording of design objectives from interviews and how the projected elements, such as windbreaks, have succeeded. The design's starting situation can be assessed reasonably well from interview data and the current state of surrounding land. The proposed ecological survey could also provide information on typical local land use and ecological status.

3. Analysis of what the PFAF experiment has proved or disproved.

The third suggested source of information is the comparison and contrast between PFAF principles and practice, as informed by Ken Fern's book and the results of the work covered in the previous two sections, and relevant information and opinion on food production and land use methods. This will, of necessity, be the final part of the information gathering, depending as it does on the results and analysis of the first two parts. Carol Wellwood would hope for considerable input and suggestions from the trustees on appropriate sources of information and opinion on food production and land use methods.

The Field's greatest claim to uniqueness (although it has several) is undoubtedly the practice of vegan organics. Land where fertility and productivity have been maintained and built-up without the use of artificial fertilisers, weed killers and pesticides, or animal manures, must be extremely uncommon, and the implications of The Field's successes and failures are important for long-term food security. The information gathered from the participants of The Field experiment, including details of the making and use of compost and mulches on site, and the results obtained, will be crucial in the evaluation of these successes and failures, as will as any observations on natural controls of pests and diseases through companion planting and rotations of annual/biennial plants.

The ecological survey would contribute to an assessment of how well the design, or elements of it, reflect plant community structures in natural ecosystems, and to what effect.

REPORTING

The final report will focus on answering the question: "What has the PFAF experiment proved or disproved?". The narrative would include sections on the ecological survey, the interviews and questionnaire results, the original planting plans and lists, the plant survey and the design elements. Each would contain descriptions of their rationale, methodology, results, analyses and contributions to answering the question, brief in the case of the first three listed but more developed and with more detail for the plant survey and design elements sections. The latter section would include a detailed analysis of how elements such as windbreaks, compartments, mulches and companion plantings have worked, or not.

A section of plant-by-plant information from the plant survey could either form part of the main report or form one of the Appendices.

An analytical overview of the information would precede the overall conclusion, wherein the researcher would hope to specify what has been proved and what has been disproved, and explore future possibilities for improving the viability and effectiveness of The Field as an educational and commercial facility.

The report would be liberally illustrated with maps, photos, diagrams and, if he will give his permission, Phil James' two songs. However, to aid reproducibility, the number of pages with photos and coloured maps or diagrams would be minimised.

Appendices would include all raw survey and interview data, scans of original planting plans and lists.

Carol Wellwood favours the Harvard format for references but is happy to accommodate whichever format the Trustees prefer.

A study of PFAF's "peripheral achievements" is not necessary for this research but is recommended for further research at a later date.