

A calling in life

Above: Woodland edge, a plantation of 70-year+ Douglas, Scots pine and spruce growing down a 30-degree slope that falls away from the pheasant landing site.

Right: DSM's team, left to right: Michael Davison, Darren Wilson, Michael Wilson and Stuart Wilson.

AN orange cone placed at '11 o'clock' on a crossroads on the North Yorkshire Moors marks the entrance to DSM's current work site, a privately owned woodland that borders handsome Forestry Commission-owned plantations in the North Yorkshire Moors National Park.

A mile or more along the FC-owned forest track, a 'CCTV in Operation' sign marks the entrance to these woods, recently bought by a new owner and now stewarded by a new long-term lessee. From what contractor Darren Wilson can piece together, the site was cleared twenty-five years ago, replanted with larch and a small amount of Douglas fir, and the woodland grew unmanaged until this year.

During the last three weeks this, the first of two woodland sites totalling 27 hectares, has undergone a dramatic transformation. What was deeply dark and scrappy teenage woodland is now (for the most part) airy, well-spaced woodland brought back into management to host a new sporting venture, a tenanted pheasant shoot.

With just a few days of harvesting left, Darren Wilson invited Forestry Journal to see the machinery that has enabled them to work on more challenging sites.

Alongside a pheasant pen, the first sight of DSM Timber Limited's harvesting equipment is a backlit Valmet 890.2 forwarder driven by Darren's 15-year-old son Michael. The cab is dwarfed by the trailer's contents, piled ever higher with



Forestry Journal last visited forestry contractors DSM Timber Limited in 2012. Carolyn Locher recently returned to see how things have changed over the past six years.

grab-arms full of small, wispy whole trees. When full, the Valmet rumbles along the forest track and unloads its contents at the far end of a chipping pile: a mound of brash, 60 metres in length and almost three times a person's height.

Walking the length of a digger-cleared track cut for machinery access, the sound of a chainsaw indicates the area being worked. A flicker of high-vis day-glo through the blur of teenage tangles, mostly self-set birch masking larger-diameter, mixed species stems, places Darren working ahead of DSM's 36-tonne tracked Tigercat LH 845C.

This purpose-built Tigercat harvester, driven by Darren's son Stuart, literally allows DSM to work in parts that others cannot reach, and it is one of several investments made since they last featured in Forestry Journal in 2012. "Not much has changed," says Darren, an open, plain-speaking Yorkshireman. "We have just got bigger machinery."

Darren's first harvester was an Ösa 250. By 2015, he had progressed to a Tigercat 845C. "We went to see Stewart Booth at Treetop Forestry (Laurencekirk), where Stuart had a go on a Tigercat. We had won a tender for a large clearfell on steep

ground. We were not sure this machine was for us but they offered to let us use the machine for three weeks. If we were still unsure, they said they would take it back. After two weeks, I told them they'd best leave the machine with us."

DSM then moved to an FC site that sloped at 48 degrees in places. "Working from a main track, we felled everything we could reach above and below. To reach the higher trees, we used our digger to cut a four-foot trench along the side of the hill, allowing one of the Tigercat's tracks to sit in it and move evenly across the hillside. Stuart went along this track in the Tigercat, throwing the trees down the hill." A video on D Wilson Timber's Facebook page illustrates this. "The video has had over 25,000 views!

THE PURPOSE-BUILT
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The FC hadn't seen anything like it." Stuart is rather put out by the small-diameter material being cut at the current site. He uses the Tigercat's Logmax 9000 head - capable of cutting up to 90 cm diameter - as a grab, bunching spindly birch stems cleared by Darren and placing them in neat 'ready for forwarding' piles.

Only then can he fell any marked larger-diameter stems into eight- or ten-foot logs. Two hundred yards away, a second harvesting machine, a tracked 13-tonne JCB JS130 digger, utilises a TMK 300 tree shear head with accumulator arm (from Field and Forest Machinery) bought specifically for this job. Operator Michael Davison says, "We are cutting 12-inch diameter birch, larch and other softwoods. It is a good machine for the job." Darren adds,

"We have to be careful over the stumps; these tracks are not protected like the Tigercat's."

Darren spent the first nine years of his working life with the Royal Electrical Mechanical Engineers (REME), as a mechanic and welder on wheeled vehicles, armoured vehicles and tanks. Leaving the REME in 1985, he worked six different jobs in five years before finding his calling in a wagonload of six-foot lengths of roundwood timber, which he cut up and sold for firewood. "When I wanted more, the supplier said he had none, but that they had come from Castle Howard. I called the head forester and asked to buy some timber and started felling it myself. They say 'if you stick it [forestry] for two weeks, you will stick it for life'."

Twenty-eight years on and now 57, Darren says, "You make your own way in life; it is hard work but you get there. I will hand over the business to my lads. They will continue if they want to. If they don't, they can sell and do what they want to do." When asked, both Stuart and Michael seem very keen to continue the business.

Michael is considering attending an arboriculture course at Askham Bryan College with his work placement at DSM when he is 16. Stuart, now 23, is Darren's right-hand man. Aged 16 and 3 months, Stuart was the youngest person in England to gain his forwarder operator ticket and one of the youngest to get his harvester operator ticket. Darren would like him to get more involved in the tendering side.

From respacing these two sites, DSM will realise 300 tonnes of firewood, 300 tonnes of softwood and 800 tonnes of brash. "Whole-tree brash is chipped on site by Yorkshire contractors J & S Vicary. We have only just started working with Chris. Recently, we both tendered for a parcel of timber, which he got on price, but we harvested it for him with the Tigercat. This

A time-saving 15-foot-wide forwarding trailer, used on clearfell sites for moving brash over long distances.



Left: Fendt tractor and Herbst lowloader 26-foot long by 8-foot wide trailer.

Above: Darren Wilson, an open and plain-speaking Yorkshireman, with plantation growing down a 30-degree slope that will be put up for tender imminently.

CONTRACTOR PROFILE



Left: Stuart putting the Tigercat with Logmax 9000 head through its paces on small-diameter roundwood.

Centre: Operator Michael Davison drives DSM's second harvesting machine, a tracked 13-tonne JCB JS130 digger that utilises a TMK 300 tree shear head with accumulator arm, bought (from Field and Forest Machinery) specifically for this job.

Below: A time-saving 15-foot-wide forwarding trailer, used on clearfell sites for moving brash over long distances, was made by welding together modified extension pins.

is the third time he has chipped for us. He is a hard worker, he does what he says, and we are very pleased to work with him."

Ten-foot lengths of hardwood will go for firewood. Eight-foot-length softwood goes back to the yard for milling into dunnage (timber bearers), lengths of timber with two flat sides and two sides with the bark. "We put the roundwood through a double-slabber. We sell as many bearers as we can produce." What remains will go locally for softwood chip.

Since 2005, DSM has been based in Easingwold. The yard accommodates up to 5,000 tonnes of both FSC and non-FSC timber, DSM having acquired chain-of-custody certification last year. Log sheds contain 1,500 tonnes of dry logs at the moment. Michael (last seen in FJ making kindling with an axe), now feeds dunnage offcuts through a Posch kindling machine in the firewood processing area. Larger roundwood (especially poplar) is cut for dunnage on a Lucas Mill.

Additional machinery investments include two more forwarders (a Valmet 890 and a Valmet 860 (black cab)), a Fendt 939 tractor and a Herbst low-loader. Where equipment needed for a job is not readily available to buy, DSM modifies what they already have. A time-saving 15-foot-wide forwarding trailer, used on clearfell sites for moving brash over long distances, was made by welding together modified extension pins. "We made a brash rake. We cut a plywood template for the size of tines we wanted and took them into Clarks, Dumfries, at 9 am and said, 'We need seven of these as well as a quick-hitch bracket'. By one o'clock, they were all profiled and ready to take back to the yard where Stuart

welded them up ready for use."

Stuart wants to win more steep-ground contracts. Darren says, "We would have to invest in a D8 bulldozer or 30-40-tonne excavator and a winch, lowering the Tigercat down slopes with the winch so that it is not running free. We have been speaking with North Sea Winches Ltd (Scarborough) about a purpose-built 100-tonne winch, allowing us to work on 60-degree slopes. On YouTube, we've seen it being done in New Zealand. We've no work that justifies it yet, but it is an option. It's doing stuff no-one else is doing, thinking outside the box. However, when the time comes...I will not be in the harvester, put it that way."

With jobs booked for the foreseeable future, following completion of this site, DSM will move to an FC site on the North Yorkshire Moors that will take three months or more. Bought standing, site unseen, this job will release timber for dunnage, roundwood for Taylormade Timber and 500 tonnes of chipwood for the FC. "In North Yorkshire, anything you buy from the FC has a 'retained timber' element, felled and put to roadside for nothing."

A further 150-acre parcel of thinnings (private owner) will keep the team busy for three summers. Works include upgrading a three-quarter mile road, scraping, digging culverts and ditches, and filling in with



stone where needed.

This 150-acre contract was won on the back of the owner seeing a 60-acre clearfell worked by DSM over two summers. "We turn nothing down. Turn something down and you might lose out on a big job." Access to the 60-acre clearfell site provided DSM the opportunity to build a bridge. "There was a long three-mile extraction route, or a shorter 1.5-mile downhill route through a farmyard and over a bridge. The existing bridge was narrow and could not have withstood the weight of a lorry. We fabricated a steel bridge in the yard



Before...
The existing bridge was narrow and could not have withstood the weight of a lorry.

After...
The fabricated steel bridge is still there and large enough to carry timber lorries.

and bolted it together on site to allow wagon access to the site. It is still there, and large enough to carry timber lorries." Darren assumes the bridge was why larger contracting companies walked away from the job.

Darren walks across an airy pheasant-landing site, respacing that DSM completed two weeks ago. They retained more stems than marked, single stems of birch and larch, to keep the area from appearing too barren. He stops at the far woodland edge, which falls away from this flat, dry site. Growing down the 30-degree slope, a self-thinned plantation of 70-year+ Douglas, Scots pine and spruce will be put out for tender imminently. With machinery more than capable of working both the slope and the size of the trees

- a point agreed by both the game-keeper and new long-term leaseholder - Darren hopes that his tender will be considered and successful.

In two days' time, the Tigercat and JCB move on to the second plantation. The forwarder follows in a week, once the brash has been gathered, piled and chipped and all logs have been transported to their yard on the Herbst low-loader. From well-managed plantations to timber growing on steep or wet or poor-quality sites, DSM is interested in all timber. "We look at jobs in a different way, and with the machinery we have, we

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are geared up for jobs that other people do not want."

At the APF, Stuart looked at forwarding trailers with cranes to run with the Fendt tractor, making the unit self-sufficient. Still reliant on local haulage companies for local product deliveries, Darren is considering investing in a timber lorry and four-axle low loader. Future investments for the yard include a chipper canter line. "It is quick and produces sawn timber and chip. We have a market for chip and sawdust. Nothing is wasted."

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