



LIFE BEYOND THE MILITARY –
OUTDOORS

RXW33

By Anna Baker Cresswell

Still pinching myself that we managed to pull off our first Rural Week of 2020 at Bicton – it has been a long wait...!

On Sunday 13th September I arrived at Exeter St David's station where Chris Shepherd collected me as usual, and RXW33 had really begun.

To allow for social distancing in the minibus, we agreed with Bicton that Rural Week participants would be limited to 8, and we were delighted to be joined by 4 service leavers, and 4 veterans with all the services represented, including referrals from the [White Ensign Association](#), [The Poppy Factory](#), [RFEA](#), and [RBLI](#).

Last year [Soldier magazine](#) came to write a feature about Rural Weeks and we were delighted to be joined for the Rural Week by WO2 Steve Brooker who saw the article and jumped at the chance to find out more about the land-based sector as he enters the final 2 years of his 22 year military career.

Our Chairman Ian Elliott and Tim Lever who joins us next January as Rural Employment Manager both visited us on the Thursday and during the week I also met Sarah Houghton, Bicton's new Assistant Principal, Land-Based for the first time.

Pete Boorn was our Course Manager and Lee Kimber and Tim Scott-Ellis were our evening speakers.

Chris Shepherd's programme included the usual Archery icebreaker on the Monday morning, followed by a visit to the College farm for an introduction to Agriculture by Pete Reed.

Then it was off to meet Caroline Ayre from [Confor](#) in the woods on the Clinton Devon estate for an introduction to the Forestry industry before returning the Bicton for Robert Honan's excellent presentation about Estate Management.

Tuesday started early with a visit to [RSPB](#) to meet Toby Stephens and learn about the role of the Ranger in environmental conservation before heading to [Forestry England](#) to get another perspective from Josh Stephen.

For the first time in a Rural Week programme and kindly facilitated by Zoe Elliott our Development Board member, we visited [Exeter racecourse](#) to learn about the myriad opportunities in sports turf management, facilities management and much more which exist within the racing industry.

Perfect end to the formal learning part of the day was the opportunity to practise driving skills on the impressive range of [Holt JCB](#) machinery in the College grounds.

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Another early start on Wednesday with Andy Daw who backed up Tuesday's session on the diggers with information about opportunities in Ag Engineering and Construction Plant, followed by a visit to another part of [Clinton Devon Estates](#) to meet Tom Garner and learn about his role as a Wildlife Ranger on the estate.

Kirsty and Matt from [Hi-Line](#) gave another fantastic demonstration of Arboriculture in the Park at Bicton accompanied by the usual comprehensive industry brief and then it was off to [Forestry England](#) to learn about Forest Schools and all things learning and the countryside.

Another First for Rural Weeks when Tim Weston from [The National Game Keepers Organisation](#) delivered his Introduction to Gamekeeping session via Zoom..!

We are so grateful to Tim for taking the time to talk to us while there is so much going on and many thanks also to Nadine who gave us a brief resume of opportunities in the animal care industry.

Thursday began with a visit to [Okehampton Golf Club](#) to learn about Greenkeeping and then the journey to Debbie Kingsley's [South Yeo Farm West](#) to meet her livestock and learn about Smallholding before back to Bicton to meet Steve Ensell from [BALI](#) for his usual masterclass about opportunities for ex-military personnel in the Landscaping industry.

We usually head to the pub for our last night but in these strange times, a socially distanced walk along the beach in Budleigh Salterton was a fine way to spend our last evening and on the Friday morning it was fantastic to see Phil Sampson from [Sampson Hall](#) again as he delivered the final session of the week – Working for Yourself. Truly an inspirational and hugely motivating way to end a memorable week...

As always we are hugely grateful to our brilliant funders without whom this week would not have been possible: the Veterans' Foundation, Greenwich Hospital, RAF Benevolent Fund and The Royal Marines Charity.

Last word goes to WO2 Steve Brooker, currently serving with HQ Allied Rapid Reaction Force who saw the article about Rural Weeks in Soldier magazine last year:

"HighGround has given me the knowledge, direction and confidence I need to move forward in my resettlement period. I would highly recommend this course to anyone thinking of employment in the land based sector."

For more information about HighGround's services please contact Anna Baker Cresswell
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