

RXW15.

By Anna Baker Cresswell.

Our 6th Rural Week (RXW15) at Bicton College in Devon started on Sunday 22nd October in mizzly rain with sulky grey skies – not at all what we are used to..!

Fortunately it stayed mild all week and what rain there was, had fizzled out by the time we headed outdoors for our practicals at the College (animal welfare centre, stables, walled garden etc) and Chris and the mini-bus headed for outside visits to Exminster Golf Club, Tom Lowday's Forest School and Lord Clinton's forestry plantation.

We had 8 HighGrounders from the Army and the Royal Marines; 3 officers and for the first time, only 1 still serving and the rest veterans.

They all had different reasons for joining the Rural Week; one veteran who had been injured in Afghanistan is planning to go home to Ghana when his recovery is complete and wanted to use his time in the UK to learn about farming and conservation methods which he could take home, and another is leaving the Reserves in 4 years' time after a full career in the Army, and wanting to start planning his next chapter.

The common denominator among all our HighGrounders is that they wanted to work outdoors and to learn more about what the land-based sector has to offer – they're in the right place!

Nev Nixon former RM joined us as our new Course Manager which is a huge HighGround milestone and we are extremely fortunate that he has chosen to work with us as we develop our Rural Weeks programme.

He will be HighGround's point of contact during the Rural Week and will be responsible for all welfare and communication issues during the week, in conjunction with Chris Shepherd, at Bicton.

On Monday evening Nev shared his transition experience with us and on Tuesday evening we welcomed Scott Todd who runs Bicton Military Academy for the first time, when he came to share his transition experience from the Army, and to tell us about the Academy.

Evening speakers add an extra dimension to our Rural Weeks and we are very grateful to everyone who shares contacts and experiences so generously.

On Wednesday evening Bicton kindly hosted a reception for all the people who have helped to make the 2017 Rural Weeks possible including Richard Dorney from Strongmind Resilience, Kirsty and Matt from Hi Line, Josey and Kev from the National Trust, our friends from the Royal Marines Charity, the White Ensign Association, Our Wilton and the Worshipful Company of Farmers and of course all our wonderful presenters who share their knowledge and contacts so generously.

Dr Phil Le Grice, Bicton's Principal, Ian Elliott HighGround's Chairman and Lt Col Mark Kingston who joined us for the last Rural Week all spoke with passion and humour and I hope everyone felt appreciated and well briefed as that was the general idea..!

Our social evening at the Otter Inn in Newton Poppleford had its usual end of term feeling, and by the time Polly took our team photo on Friday after Phil Sampson's excellent Self Employment session had closed the programme, we had all made more friends and contacts and everyone had a lot to think about on their journeys back to Shropshire, Colchester, South Wales, Kent and beyond.

We gratefully acknowledge the support of Help4Heroes who helped to fund RXW15 and the other generous donors without whom Rural Weeks would not be possible.

Quote of the week:

I have enjoyed this whole week. Excellent people. My confidence and the fire in my belly has been reignited and I am very positive about my future.

Images of our HighGrounders on Rural Week 15 can be found on [HighGround's Flickr Page here.](#)