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Opening Times

Monday - Saturday 9am - 5pm • Sunday 10am - 4pm

Thick, chequered shirts, well-worn jeans, big boots, swinging axes and the smell of freshly hewn wood... there's something rather sexy about a woodcutter's image. Perhaps it's the thought of all that fresh air, green leaves, blue skies and undone shirt buttons. Or the image of a massive tree being brought crashing to the ground after a few strikes of the axe, or maybe the bravery of doing strong, tough work high up in the branches.

Whatever it is, not many of us can pass by a tree surgeon at work without at least checking if they meet our Mills & Boon dream!

The tree workers don't mind either. They like a bit of healthy appreciation, even if with hard hat, safety boots, harnesses, ropes and risk assessments they may feel less kind of the trees and more form-filling, safety officer.

But we get the chance to make up our own minds at the largest Norfolk gathering of the year of arborists and foresters at the East Anglian Game and Country Fair, supported by EDP Norfolk, this month.

On Saturday, April 26 and Sunday 27, they'll be entering the East of England Cutters and Climbers' Competition, giving spectators a fantastic show as they shimmy up trees or show off their felling and slicing skills.

We'll be watching competitors racing against each other and the clock to climb trees, aiming to get to predetermined targets as they do so. Then there's the chainsaw competition involving bar and chain event, simulated felling and snedding (chopping off branches) and precision cross-cutting. The competitors will be making it look easy, but it's skilled work, says Chalky White, co-organiser of the forestry area at the show.

He's an arborist experienced in all aspects of tree surgery work, but sees his work now as more than simply improving the health of trees or clearing dead wood.

"I am more of a tree person doing anything involving trees from start to finish - planting, felling, sawing, milling and turning the wood into a product," says Chalky.

Based near Fakenham, he is one of the few UK arborists with a sawmill, so wood from cleared branches and trees can be used properly.

"I have spent an awful lot of my life felling trees and seeing good timber going to waste or not being appreciated," he says, delighted to now have the sawmill so good wood can be used. In the past, and still today in many areas, good timber is simply chipped or burnt.

A favourite recent project was clearing trees from one garden, taking the wood to the mill and turning it into the right pieces needed to build a treehouse, which was then built in the original garden. "It's very satisfying to do something like that," he adds.

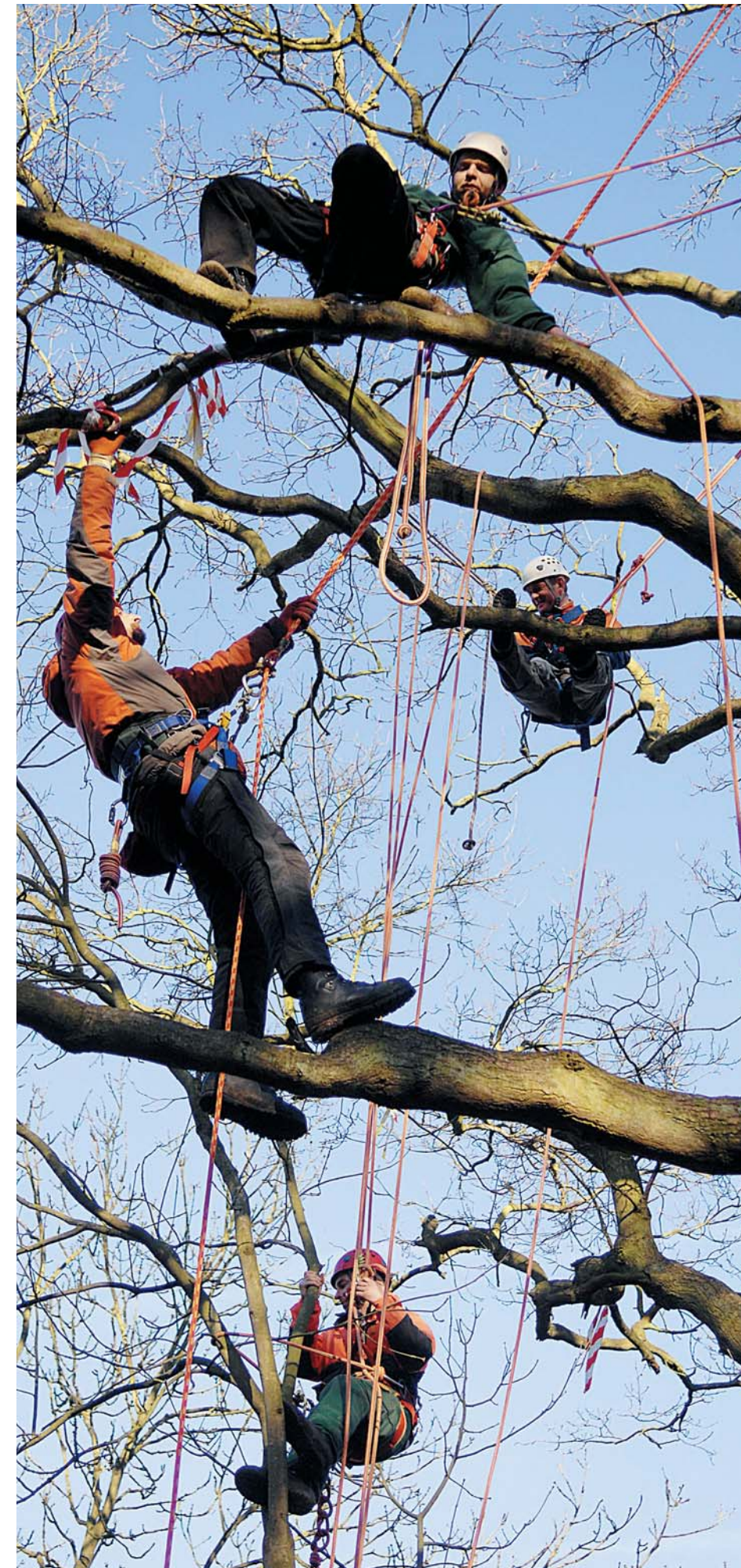
Chalky has worked in the industry for about 20 years. Having grown up on a small farm where using chainsaws was part of everyday life, he left school and began work in the industry. "I love it," he says. "To start with climbing trees and felling trees is hard work, but with more experience it becomes more of a natural process and you work out ways of making your life simpler," he says, adding that when he started he could safely fell 30 trees a day, now he can safely fell 60 a day.

He's now also one of only five technical standards verifiers in the UK too, making sure training courses are up to exacting safety levels. It's teaching things such as always working in pairs, and with tree climbing, ensuring that the man on the ground would be able to rescue the man in the tree if necessary.

Tree work isn't something to try at home, he points out, as not only are they working at height with heavy pieces of wood, but also cutting equipment.

"A lot of people think they can have a go and have a disaster," he says. At the same time, people with trees have a duty of care to ensure that any tree is not going to cause harm to anyone, he adds, so tree surgeons are kept pretty busy!

The cutting and climbing competition is an opportunity for the various expert teams to demonstrate their skills and also to socialise as tree work can be quite lonely, with much



of it carried out high off the ground and often in quite remote areas.

"It is going to be exciting to watch, it's not something you see every day. The guys taking part are the crème de la crème of the region," says Chalky, of Sculthorpe-based THF Countryside and Tree Worker Training.

The forestry area of the show couldn't be run without masses of support and help from everyone from sponsors to fellow organisers such as Tony Sorensen and Andy Campbell, stresses Chalky.

"It is a lot of work. We have a lot of support from local companies and forestry people, and I can't thank them enough," he says ●

The East Anglian Game and Country Fair will be held at the Norfolk Showground on Saturday, April 26 and Sunday 27. Tickets are available online at www.ukgamefair.co.uk or by calling 0871 230 1099 (small booking fee applies), or purchase at The Forum Tourist Information Centre and EDP offices. Save up to £7 by buying in advance: £18 family (two adults, three children), £7 adult, £2 child, under-fives and car parking free (up to April 20). Members enjoy a front-row, ring-side seat as well as prioritised admission and car parking, members' enclosure, bar and restaurant. Membership from £7 child, £18 adult, £39 family; visit www.ukgamefair.co.uk for booking form. Weekend Break Offer is £59 and gives four people two days' entry and three nights' camping. Visit above website for booking form. Show office: 01263 735828.

DON'T FORGET TO VISIT THE EDP NORFOLK STAND!

New for this year, top chefs from the region will be running cookery demonstrations adjoining the EDP Norfolk stand, between 11am and 4pm on both days. Chefs sharing secrets of their success include:

Steve Thorpe, head chef at Broad House Hotel, who will be kicking off the cookery theatre each day. Read Steve's step-by-step recipes in EDP Norfolk every other month; next recipe in May. **Andy Parle**, executive chef of the Walpole Arms, near Itteringham, and a regular writer for the EDP. **Chris Coubrough**, proprietor of the Crown Hotel at Wells and star of ITV's Coastal Kitchen, who will be demonstrating dishes from the latest series. **Rory Whelan**, executive head chef of The Hoste Arms, the Restaurant of the Year at EDP Norfolk Food Awards 2007. **Duncan Philp**, head chef at the White Horse, Blakeney. **Sean Creasey**, chef/owner of Butlers in Holt. **Eric Snaithe**, head chef at Titchwell Manor. **Matthew Miller**, manager at The Black Boys, Aylsham. Female duo **Vanessa Scott and Maggie Cooper** from the award-winning kitchen at Stratton's Hotel, near Swaffham.

Find us at **Countryside Drive Stand One (opposite the tea and coffee area), near the Dereham Gate entrance.**

For more information about the cookery theatre at the show or for chefs' profiles, please visit www.ukgamefair.co.uk