

## *Being and Living in a Time of Crisis*

### **Standing tall against problem of deforestation in Tipperary**

**Irish Independent 10th August 2010**

*Unlike fiction spun into fact, Fogarty's farm is the real woodland deal. Matt Fogarty's tree farm has become one of the finest examples of what woodland owners can create to redress the damage that deforestation has caused.*

**Photo: Matt is the brother of Virgil Fogarty (US Region)**

Good stories can, as time passes, take on a life of their own where the margins of factual truth become blurred. Fiction then becomes legend and is often finally accepted as historical fact. All the best stories of our childhood that spoke of the ancient warriors and the fairy people of Ireland evolved over many thousands of years and, by becoming intermingled with historical reality, great legends emerged that continually entertained and inspired us.

One of the finest examples of a piece of fiction becoming accepted as historical fact was Jean Giono's wonderful book, *The Man Who Planted Trees*. Written in 1953, it told the tale of a French shepherd, Elzéard Bouffier, who each year gathered acorns and beech mast and, by poking holes in the ground with his staff, sowed them as he went about his daily travels across the hillsides and valleys near Provence.

As the years passed, formerly barren landscapes became leafy and once the trees began to grow they were valued and accepted as naturally occurring woodland. Water returned to the region and streams reappeared as the copses and woods grew, restoring the balance of nature and bringing life back to the countryside.

Bouffier then took on a posthumous existence as remarkable as his imaginary real life. Wherever the story was published, in places as far apart as New Zealand, Europe and the United States,



people believed in it. This was long before it became fashionable to plant trees and redress the environmental damage that deforestation has caused throughout the world.

I was reminded of this famous story when visiting Matt Fogarty's tree farm and nursery in Tipperary. Woods and copses are growing there, when before there was open land. Splendid specimens of redwoods and fir stand tall and proud among a multitude of broadleaf species. During a recent open day, Matt took us on a tour through his trees and surprised us with yet more wonderful and previously unseen exotic species among the acres of natives.

He has just planted a further seven acres of oak and, despite having reached a venerable age, has



***'Enlarge the site of your tent...' in the shelter of the oak***

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many further additions planned. Matt's knowledge and love of trees is legendary and I have sourced many of my own favourite specimens at his nursery in Ballinderry.

The way it all began is on a par with anything in Giono's book as Matt related how, many years ago, he approached his bank manager for money to plant some trees. This was before the current afforestation schemes had emerged and, as much of Matt's planned woodland would not have tied in with Forest Service thinking and was way ahead of its time, grants would probably not have been forthcoming.

Nowadays, we are encouraged to establish mixed woodland with many diverse species, but up to 30 years ago the single-species plantation was the order of the day. However, Matt was not to be put off and despite his bank manager's refusal to fund tree planting, he managed to get a loan to buy cattle and grow some barley. With the finance in place, he then bought trees anyway - and the rest is history. Fogarty's tree farm and nursery grew in fame and many farms, gardens, golf courses and hotel grounds found the right specimens and the inspiration of how and where to plant them by consulting with Matt and making use of his services.

He was one of the first to campaign for an increase in the planting of broadleaf species and constantly complained about the lack of 'teenage' oak, ash, beech and other valuable hardwoods in our Irish woodlands. The planting of broadleaves had, to a large degree, ceased in Ireland and most of our deciduous woodland had been felled. Those that remained were mostly at the fringes of old estates or stood as parkland trees, many more than two centuries old. Growing broadleaves in numbers did not really resume to any worthwhile extent until the mid-1990s.

Walnut is one of Matt's favourites and I was astonished at how well some had grown in the 10 years since my last visit to his nursery. I remember returning home at that time with the back of my car filled with walnut saplings, some unusual oak, a few sequoias, and even a dawn redwood, which has grown into a tall and graceful specimen. Surely proof that it is never too late in life to plant trees.

*The Man Who Planted Trees* by Jean Giono is published by the Harvill press, London.

Matt Fogarty can be found among his trees at Fogarty's Tree Farm and Nursery, Ballinderry, Nenagh, Co Tipperary.

**Joe Barry, Irish Independent**



**Planting one of Matt's trees in the grounds of Teach Bhride Tullow, July, 2007**

**Standing: Bridin Clancy, Pat Guinan (Maria Guinan's sister), Matt Fogarty, Maree Marsh, Elizabeth McDonald, Thomasina Murphy, Maureen Keady, Mary Dalton, Paula Conway, Carmel McEvoy.**

**Sitting: Bernadette Fogarty, Virgil Fogarty and Cyprian Wilson.**

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