



Where the Buffalo Roam

For several years now I have wanted to begin a newsletter specifically for all of our past workshop students as a way to keep all of you in touch and connected. While I know many of you have connected and helped each other cut and raise frames, with a little facilitation, much more can take place. It is a force to be reckoned with, and I am confident that there is nothing you couldn't build as a group. I still have plans to one day build the stave church at the school campus. When the time comes, you will all be invited.

In searching through photos for this newsletter I came along this one of a herd of buffalo I took on the road from Slim Buttes to Pine Ridge last year. Working with the Lakota People over the years I have come to learn a bit about their ways, beliefs and ceremonies, and there seemed to be an allegory between the buffalo in Lakota mythology and this group of workshop alumni.

Lakota beliefs follow natural patterns, springing forth directly from the earth and nature, and their interaction with it. Lakota mythology is rich in stories about the buffalo, perhaps the most sacred of all their symbols. Their belief is that the buffalo came from within the earth and that their spirit presides over fertility, virtue, industry, and the family. The buffalo spirit is the guardian of pregnant women, and to industrious, hard working people. The buffalo was the primary food source for hundreds of years, and the skins provided both clothing and shelter. This of its own may naturally lead to reverence, but there is something more.

Anyone who has seen a herd of buffalo roaming the plains may be able to understand this spiritual link. There is something mystical that pervades. A subtle knowing that permeates the earth and the sky and carried in the wind. The family units can be identified, bull cow and calf. Distinctly different than a herd of cattle, the buffalo has a noble presence. Seeing a herd roaming the plains in some way makes one feel that all things are complete and in order. Could it be that we have been influenced by the romanticism portrayed in the movies? Or, could it be that their nobility is what sparked the romantic portrayals? Nobility is intrinsic to the buffalo. It has nothing to do with preconception, but more to do with conception.

This is a large force, this Fox Maple student base. The people and experiences of each workshop are all linked to one another in a 'meta-euphorical' way, as



Ed and Mary Toole's frame they cut and raised in 1996.



one student put it. As students, you have all shared in a common experience, regardless of which workshop you attended. You all know about the Jean-Claude Killy effect, perfection and grace, the one-eyed god of fine joinery, the sound of a perfectly fit joint, and just how large a fat-16th really is. You know the importance of tuning your timber frame to the pitch of A, and how you can tune it by using a flying-wedge harmonic distortion block, or some derivation thereof, should there be too many fat 16ths. You understand the importance of harmonics—the sound of a sharp tool, a perfectly fit joint—the Fox Maple sound track. You all remember the Tacoma Narrows Bridge, the one that flew apart due to harmonic distortion. No doubt it was tuned to a *b* flat.

You also understand the passion of timber framing that is a part of me, and also the challenges in each workshop that make the passion even greater. You know I rely on small miracles.

I returned from the Costa Rica workshop just days ago with hopes of finding time to lay down this newsletter, but doubted I'd have time to do so before Kauai, which begins in just a few days. But then I checked my message machine. There was a message from Ed Toole. It was short. "Hey Steve, Ed calling. Just calling to see how you are doing." No more.



Ed & Mary Toole

Ed and his wife Mary took a few workshops. The first in Waldoboro, Maine 1994, then York, Pa, and Sylvatus, Virginia in 1995, and then they went on to build a killer frame in Chestertown, Maryland, which they cut in the summer of 1996 and raised that October. Ed and Mary were retired before the first workshop.

Mary became the mortising Queen. When the raising time came they called and I went down to help them raise the frame, but soon realized they didn't need me. The bents were assembled and pegged, the plates and purlins stacked in order of raising. I stepped on the site, took a look around, and confirmed it was all set for the crane to arrive in 30 minutes (it was on it's way anyway). Within 6 hours the frame was raised, purlins and plates set and pegged. The hammerbeam bent resonated to a perfect A. Perfection and grace. By 3 p.m. we were celebrating with their children and grandchildren. The one-eyed god was looking on favorably that day.

Shortly thereafter I received a phone call from Jim Richter. Jim is another special soul. He has taken part in a few workshops. His first one was in the spring of 2000 here in Maine. But he also made Telluride, Colorado 2000, Airville, PA 2002, and the advanced workshop in Maine in the spring of 2003. Jim was a Master Chief on a submarine for over 23 years. He has a heart of gold as only one can develop from spending 6 months at a whack at the bottom of the Pacific...either you crack, or you find yourself. Jim found himself. He was set back a bit a few months ago, had a heart attack. He's a young man, old only in wisdom, but he's back on his feet. So, he calls to tell me he bought a Harley—a full-blown hog, soft tail. He's living high. He says, "I told my wife that if by chance I don't happen to show up for two or three days sometime, it has nothing to do with you, and not to worry...I'll just be riding."

Still thinking about other plans and efforts before I head to Kauai, a truck pulled into the door yard of the school today and it turned out to be Ishvi Aum. Ishvi lives in Albion, California. He attended the combined workshops here in Maine in the spring of 2001. He went back and built a beautiful frame, enclosed with wood chip/clay. He brought some photos to show me.

I'd lived in Albion in the early 70's on the Navarro Ridge Road. This is where I built my first timber frame in 1970, which set me on the path that ultimately led to Maine, and a life as a timber framer. The story is related in the introduction of my book. One day during the workshop we started talking about Albion. I mentioned a woman I had known who was a midwife. She lived on a sister farm on Albion Ridge. I was very young at the time and remembered her especially because of the sweet, motherly kindness she bestowed upon me. "Last time I saw her she was pregnant," I tell Ishvi, "due to give birth any time." As it turns out, this woman was Ishvi's mother, and he was the child in her womb. A small world you might say, but it makes me wonder, "where do the buffalo roam?" —Steve Chappell



Ishvi Aum's frame raising on New Years, 2002. The house ready for woodchip clay infill.



Costa Rica 2004

In the recent workshop in Costa Rica we built a 20' diameter hexagonal pavilion for the Coope de Santa Elena at their coffee processing plant, el Benefico, in San Luis Abajo. The plant serves also as the drying yard, nursery and roasting facility for coffee growers from 7 surrounding communities. The 40-year-old mill, which separates the husks from the coffee bean is direct water powered. With its array of belts and wheels, it is reminiscent of a Rube Goldberg contraption.

In recent years the coope has fallen on hard times due to the plummeting world coffee prices due in large part to the World Bank's investment in coffee production in Vietnam and other developing nations. This increased world production has flooded the market, making it difficult for small Central American coffee producers to compete. In response, the coope is hoping to increase local retail sales at el beneficio. The pavilion will serve as a visitor center where tourists can tour the coffee plant to learn how the coffee is processed, hang out and have a fresh cup of coffee, and hopefully purchase a bag to go. This is a small thing, but the coope is small and the average grower produces fewer than 200 kilos per year.

The frame was built using chain saw milled cypress timbers harvested from the tree farm at the Monteverde Institute (MVI), approximately 8 kilometers from San Luis. The stand of trees made up of pines and cypress were planted in the mid-70's and ranged in girth from 12 to 20 inches. These non-indigenous trees have proven to have an adverse effect on the ecosystem affecting both the fauna and flora indigenous to the Cloud Forest location. We have been working with MVI to develop a long term harvesting program that will ultimately result in a low impact transition to a natural forest made up of indigenous species, many of which are endangered. The selective harvesting has been carried out carefully so as not to damage the existing native species in the understory. It is these trees that will naturally replace the pines and cypress. We've been harvesting from this site for the past 4 years and the regeneration of the native species from our earliest harvest has exceeded



The frame was set above the coffee mill. In the foreground are coffee seedlings.



The cypress posts were scribe fit to large stones set 2 feet into the ground.

everyone's expectations.

We were joined by past workshop students, **Adam Heintz** and **Jared Lockwood**. Adam, a teacher at the Putney School in Vermont, attended the Kauai 2002 workshop, and Jared, a high school senior from Bolton, MA, was a walk-on participant in the summer 2001 Pine Ridge workshop. **Todd Jaillett** (student in the Costa Rica 2001 workshop) made a surprise visit and joined us in the cutting process for 3 days. All the participants lived with local families in San Luis.

We're planning to return to Costa Rica next winter to continue our community building program, and will keep all new updates posted on our website, www.foxmaple.com.



Core group of student in the Coope de Santa Elena workshop.

New Email for Future Updates

Students contacting us should send emails to studentnews@foxmaple.com. Please include your current mailing address so we can maintain an up to date snail mail and email database. Thanks!

A Quaker Common House in Chatham, NY

Jens and Eric Braun traveled to Maine in the spring of 1996 to take part in the first workshop at the then new school site. We cut the office frame, and raised it in the pouring rain. Jens and Eric grew up in Ecuador, and it was they who first planted the seed that has become our IPCBI program.

For the past few years they have been working with a group of 15 families on the Quaker Intentional Village Project (QVIP) in Chatham, NY. The community project is situated on a 135 acre farm, beautifully situated on a southerly slope a half hour south of Albany. Last July, we set up a two week workshop with QVIP family members and 5 outside students to construct the Common House frame. The frame was a 26'x36' two story king post design that will form the nucleus of the community grounds. They'll be working this spring and summer to complete the enclosure with a woodchip/clay infill. I'm sure they would appreciate any volunteers to help out in this process.

You can check out the project at their website: <http://www.qivp.org>



Indigenous People's Community Building Initiative Projects

We initiated our IPCBI program in the summer of 2001 in Slim Buttes, on the Pine Ridge Reservation with the construction of 2 greenhouses as a donation to Tom Cook's gardening program. Last year Cook sprouted over 25,000 seedlings in these greenhouses and distributed them free to over 500 families on the reservation. Cook, the regional field coordinator for **Running Strong for American Indian Youth** (www.indianyouth.org), has been directing a reservation wide gardening initiative on the Pine Ridge reservation for the past 15 years, in which, he educates community members in organic gardening, tills their garden patch, and supplies these seedlings for free.

When I first met Tom he was out in the middle of a field tearing apart a tractor (one of 7 he owns, of which, hopefully, one is running at any given time). He was attempting to sprout seedlings in a makeshift greenhouse with little success, and buying most of the seedlings he gave away.

We returned to Pine Ridge in 2002 to build an equipment repair garage/workshop, so he could repair tractors indoors, out of the sun and rain. The shop frame was so nice that his wife, Loretta Afraid of Bear, wouldn't let him bring in the tractors, so it became a field office and woodworking shop with an upstairs apartment. The project was funded by Running Strong and student tuitions. Last October, Tom was still repairing tractors in the open field, so we returned to build a tractor repair work

shed off the west side. This project was funded by the **Onaway Trust** (www.onaway.org) and student tuitions. The Slim Buttes site has become a viable learning center that we will use for future workshops.

In the interim we have expanded the program to include work with small communities in Costa Rica and Kauai. In each of these workshops we have built a structure that would in some way benefit the community. The structures are beautiful. However, the goal of the IPCBI is not to build structures, these are a by-product. The real goal is to engage with the community in such a way that they will become inspired to take control of their own building environment. It's all about education and creativity. It's about developing a new vernacular architecture within these indigenous communities.

A structure may be built in a matter of weeks or months, this is the easy part. The more difficult and longer term effort is in creating a trained and eager core group of people with vision. This takes 3 to 4 years minimum. We're now beginning to see the real fruit of our efforts. On the Pine Ridge we have developed a core group of people who now understand the finer aspects of timber framing, in the Jean-Claude vein, perfection and grace. Last year we worked with 8 high school students from the **Oglala Community School** (OCS). The kids got excited, and because of this, so did the



Tom Cook (in hat) and students of the Pine Ridge School at the Slim Buttes base camp.

school. I submitted a proposal last fall to set up an educational program within the school. The proposal was approved and we will begin the first phase at the end of April 2004. The first project will be a 32'x48' timber frame workshop at the school site. The students will cut the frame and finish it as a class project.

The OCS project is being funded through the school, but most of the IPCBI workshop projects are funded directly through student tuition. This is why we need you. If you would like to get involved in the OCS or any upcoming IPCBI projects, send emails to studentnews@foxmaple.com.

Advanced Timber Framing

The Advanced Timber Framing book has been in the works for years now. Most of the tough work is completed, mostly the tedium of choosing photos. My son Tait and I traveled to Europe in November to shoot photos for a lighter hearted, non-technical, chapter on historic hip and valley systems. As you all know, the main subject is extremely technical and not necessarily light reading. There's not much I can do about that, it is a technical subject, conceptually and mathematically.

The trip was a 2 week, whirlwind tour through France, Germany, Belgium, Netherlands and England. We took over 1,000 photos of structures dating from the early 13th through the 16th centuries. We had connections with framers in each country who directed us to classic examples. After two days enjoying the sites of Paris, we traveled west to Troyes to visit French campaignon **Niels Bohr**. I had met Bohr at the Guild conference in Montebello last fall and was impressed with his work. Bohr's company does a lot of restoration as well as new work, most of which includes compound hip and valley roof framing.

France seems to have developed one of the most sophisticated vernacular roof framing systems in Europe and has been most successful in keeping the traditions alive. One of the most interesting structures we visited with Bohr was a 15th century church near Troyes. Bohr and his company had recently completed an extensive restoration of the 4 valley roof system. We spent the day with Bohr touring the countryside, and then headed to the campaignon house in Troyes for dinner. Over 50, 16 to 20 year old's, apprenticing in all aspects of building, lived in the house. It was a great experience.



15th century church near Troyes, France

We then traveled to Germany to visit **Frank Andresen** in Dusseldorf. Frank, of course, is the clay builder who spent several summers teaching here at the school campus in Maine. He was currently restoring the clay work on a 15th century manor, which had great examples of German valley systems. We spent two days with Frank touring

small villages surrounding Dusseldorf, and then headed to the Rheinisches Freilichtmuseum Kommern, about an hour south of Koln. The open-air museum had more than 50 restored structures, ranging from blacksmith shops to windmills, built between the 13th to 16th centuries. There were many fine examples of compound framing, perhaps the most intriguing being the windmills.

Our travels then led us through the Netherlands and Belgium. We spent the day in Antwerp, visiting the Cathedral and enjoying the ancient city, one of the few not bombed during the war.

We next took the ferry from Calais to Dover, England to visit **Barbara Czoch** in the village of Wye, county of Kent. Barbara, a devout timber framer and student at the Costa Rica 2003 workshop, showed us a great time and many fine structures. The highlight was the 13th century Tithe barn in Brook. We happened to arrive in England in perfect timing for Bush's visit, and the World Cup Rugby finals. Bush brought out tens of thousands of protesters to London, and the Rugby finals brought the rest of the country to the pubs. This was the first trip to the finals for England and the whole country was tuned to a feverish pitch, nearing insanity. The pubs got a special dispensation from the Queen to open early for the 9am match and it seemed all of England were gathered around the TV in their local pub. Of course, Tait and I were part of the crowd. The big news, Bush was spurned by the tabloids for not sharing a pint with Blair, and England, of course, won in heroic fashion in the final seconds. It was a rare moment.

We wound the trip up by taking the chunnel back to France. It was a great trip, and we got some great shots to round out the book. Now I just need to find some quality time in front of my computer.



The Apprentice News

About this Newsletter

The sole purpose of this newsletter is to help solidify the connection between Fox Maple workshop students. It is being sent only to past students. This is a large group that includes well over 1,000 people since our first workshop in 1983. Due to time and people moving about, database crashes, etc., we have lost track of many of our early students, but our current database includes over 600 students, and currently grows at about 100 students per year. Each year several of these students build frames, and many more would like to be involved in building one. I try my best to help make these connections, but with all my efforts and travels, it's impossible for me to keep up, so, I'm asking for your help.

Quarterly Newsletter for and by the Students?

It is likely that there are no fewer than 10 students who live within 100 miles of you. Publishing a quarterly newsletter that posts student news and upcoming projects would be a great way maintain contact. If you are raising a frame, other students would like to know about it. To initiate a newsletter would require someone to act as the clearing house to collect and compile info in an orderly fashion. Is there anyone out there who would like to volunteer to take this on?

Student Website?

Creating a website specifically for students would be another great way to keep the networking active. This could be set up so that students could directly post notices and photos of their projects. It could contain a message board where current news items could be posted. If you needed a few people to help raise a frame, or come for a weekend cutting party, you could post it directly in front of your fellow students. Many of our past students own sawmills. You might be looking for timbers, or you might have some to sell, or you may want to buy or sell a mortising machine, or a Swan chisel (I'll give you 5 bucks). Whatever it is, a website specifically geared to students would be a great way to keep the student to student connections alive and vibrant. This of course would take a webmaster to set it up and maintain it. I don't have the knowledge or the time to do so, but maybe you do. Any web proficient students out there who would like to volunteer to set this in motion?

Volunteers?

If you would like to volunteer to help coordinate either of the above, contact me via email at: studentnews@foxmaple.com. At any rate, send us an email so we can update our snail and email databases.

Student News

The frame cut in the spring 2003 workshop at Fox Maple was purchased by **John Kimball**, one of the stand out students. He's planning to raise it on his land in southern Vermont in early June (unfortunately coinciding with our workshops). If anyone would like to help him out you can contact him via email at john@kimballgroupinc.com.

Every year we schedule 2 or 3 traveling workshops that are sponsored by past students. This year we will be doing three. The first, sponsored by **Brad Bendickson**, will take place in Grand Junction, Iowa May 3-8. Brad has attended several workshops including KC 1996, Pine Ridge 2001, Airville, PA 2002 and Oskaloosa, KS 2002. At last, it's his turn. The raising will be on May 8th. You can reach Brad via email at bendfam6@hotmail.com. **James Urbanowski**, student in the Head-of-Jedore, Nova Scotia 1995 workshop will be sponsoring a workshop in Gagetown, New Brunswick this July 5-10. He is currently milling all of the logs in preparation. You can contact James at JUrbanowsky@nbpower.com. In August we'll be heading to Port Orford, Oregon to do a workshop hosted by **Stilly Sprague**. Stilly took part in the spring 2003 workshops at Fox Maple. The dates are set for August 2-7. It is rumored that the site is spectacular. Stilly can be reached at PasoVenado@aol.com. As always, it is a pleasure to have past students join us for the raisings, especially for traveling workshops.

The Campus

The Library and the Dining Hall at Fox Maple have been evolving every year since the initial frame raising's. These buildings have been our work projects for natural building workshops, thatch and clay. The library frame was cut in the Spring 1996 workshop, and the dining hall in spring 1997.



Dining Hall



Fox Maple Library

Fox Maple School of Traditional Building

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207-935-3720

Check out our website!!!

www.foxmaple.com

