

NEW YEAR at SCOTNEY CASTLE

A Part-Timer's Perspective

By Cassie Hoyland

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Being a person normally wary of flouting the rules, I was very naughty this New Year and arranged to arrive at Scotney Castle two days later than everyone else, therefore missing most of the task work whilst enjoying maximum free time and frolicking on the day off. This was not deliberate you understand, as other festivities kept me away and, surprisingly, many folk still thought me good to do the few hours tree planting I actually did (I think I got off quite lightly there).

It could have been so nice: clear blue sky and golden sunlight, with long wintry shadows nursing patches of frost across the landscape. Unfortunately we had rain, and not just showers either. Relentless, hopeless rain had apparently persisted for the days before my arrival and continued throughout the 30th December, so that our whole hillside squelched and even its mole-hills bore forth springs. The tree planting was not a simple task either; 'tree imprisoning' would be a better description, involving fence-posts, wire and much hammering. I greatly admire my fellow weekenders, who had already done most of the work in planting the twelve trees and erecting their tall 'sheep guards'.

So, after we had finished off the last of the work and had a wash and brush-up at the basecamp, some of us had a nice game of cards. It was a novel game, but fortune allowed me to spend a long time designated 'the president' (which was far better than the lowlier alternative). The others had their revenge in the end however, when my luck ran out.

Later that evening, I experienced something previously unseen in my CNTV history...a cocktail party! Our hosts Ruth & John invited us to their gorgeous house, where we partook in a range of fancily-titled beverages. We were all the more grateful for their hospitality after the journey there in the dark, via the bottomless-pit-potholed estate roads and flooded lanes.

On New Year's Eve (our day off), we had a busy day, first exploring Battle (of 1066 fame) and then on to Rye, which is a magical place. I am grateful to Peter for talking me into climbing the church tower there, as the view was truly spectacular, despite its staircase built for elves and thin people. After further exploration of the town in search of Martello towers and Trish & Colin, we returned to the basecamp, grateful that the weather had been kind to us on our day off.

Richard cooked a very exciting veggie meal for our supper, which unfortunately I can't spell, but which didn't deserve any abuse it might have received prior to the eating (at least it wasn't quorn!).

New Year passed in a fairly typical CNTV fashion, from my understanding, though there was another break from the norm in the 'after-midnight disco' that erupted from nowhere. So, that just about covers it; all in all, another fascinating insight into basecamp life and behaviour. Did I leave out the best bits..? I'm sure Roger will have some great photos for the newsletter, if the lights stayed on for long enough...