

NHS OUTING – SUNDAY 19 APRIL 2015
LANTAU TREE WALK AND PLANTING WITH PAUL MELSOM

Weatherwise, we were a lucky bunch of NHS tree-planting hopefuls gathered at Mui Wo ferry pier on Sunday afternoon as dark clouds threatened, but rain held off and the temperature was reasonably comfortable. Met by our tree-planter extraordinaire, Paul Melsom, a Lantau resident, we set off up to the planting site at about 150m elevation, with a magnificent view over the Mui Wo valley.



Pausing on a firebreak path to admire the view of Luk Tei Tong village in the Mui Wo valley

Photo below courtesy of Sandy Szeto



Along the way Paul pointed out several flourishing trees in the project, including the edible-fruited Chinese Strawberry tree (*Myrica rubra*), Wild Pear (*Pyrus calleryana*), Champions Oak (*Cyclobalanopsis championii*), *Syzygium hancei*, white-blossomed *Reevesia thyrsoidea*; budding *Photinia raupingensis*, *Polyspora axillaris*, and scarlet-seeded *Ormosia Emarginata* with its attractive green trunk, and roots with nitrogen-fixing ability- typical of the pea family.

Paul has been planting native trees in this area for over 15 years, and many hundreds of school students and volunteers have helped plant and maintain this tree project. Government departments have been committed to reducing fires by cutting fire-

breaks and erecting fire break marker signs, and regular strimming. Instead of waist-high (and fire-prone) grasses, leaf litter now builds up beneath the growing Formosa Ash young trees, providing not only a mulch to retain moisture but also allowing nutrients to return to the soil.

We passed a number of sea-facing grave sites in this good fung-shui area and the path was well-paved to provide public access. Paul's trees are particularly vulnerable to fires during hot, dry weather and the two annual grave-sweeping periods, with many species of native tree dyeing in hill fires and with only a few like *Schimia superba* regenerating after fires. He also plants a mixture of local species encouraging wildlife - we saw an active bird's nest and many butterflies on the *Syzygium hancei*. Trees in flower included Sweet Viburnum *Viburnum odoratissimum* and Formosa Ash *Fraxinus griffithi* is another butterfly-attracting species. Rats stripping bark from stems can be a problem so wireguard mesh is used to protect the vulnerable trunks and also protects from over-enthusiastic strimming when the grass is cut on the paths.



Left: Andrew and Rose getting ready to plant. Mui Wo and Silvermine Bay in the background. Right: Paul demonstrating how to plant a tree properly.

Arriving at about 4.30pm at the selected planting site, we set to work with excellent B&Q spades in 5 teams, after a short demonstration by Paul on how to successfully plant 2 year old tree saplings excellently grown by Kadoorie FBG. Working in the cool of the evening but against the clock and in fading light, our group planted a

mixture of *Daphniphyllum spp.*, *Syzygium levinei* and *Machilus spp.*, with Paul's experienced team directing operations and ensuring planting quality. Eventually, with almost 30 saplings planted and exhaustion setting in, we gratefully retraced our steps down to the beach and a much-needed wash before enjoying a convivial dinner at a local Italian restaurant. Many thanks to Paul and his team for making this event possible, and to Jan and Kim for initiating such a rewarding environmentally-friendly activity; we hope to return next year to view "our" trees' progress. Patience is an important virtue when waiting for trees to grow.

Left: The spade brigade, happy to have planted about 30 trees in just over an hour.
Below: Paul tamping down the soil around a one-year-old *Daphniphyllum* sapling.



Report & photos by Chris Bailey